2016

# On Contemporary Leadership and Branded Organizations

Mark Bloemhard
*Antioch University - PhD Program in Leadership and Change*

# ON CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP AND BRANDED ORGANIZATIONS

MARK BLOEMHARD

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program

of Antioch University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

June, 2016

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

ON CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP AND BRANDED ORGANIZATIONS

prepared by

Mark Bloemhard

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Change.

Approved by:

Mitchell Kusy, Ph.D., Chair date

Laura Morgan-Roberts, Ph.D., Committee Member date

Roger Blackwell, Ph.D., Committee Member date

Thomas Kaplan, Ph.D., External Reader date

## Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to extend my appreciation for Antioch University's Leadership and Change Program—to all the visionaries, the directors, faculty, staff. It has been an amazing journey of self-discovery and possibility.

My passion for branding has been sparked by the opportunity to work for and with some remarkable people. Among those are Bruce Dybvad, Lee Carpenter, Scott Jeffrey, Bill Chidley, Lee Peterson, and Bob Welty—each one of you are nothing less than game-changing giants in the exciting land of branding.

In fact, thanking each one that has contributed to my development as a practitioner, a scholar, and a person would be impossible—their contribution of intelligence, wit, humor, wisdom, knowledge, and patience has formed the very fabric of my being.

I would be remiss not to start by highlighting an extraordinary group of academic advisors; Dr. Mitchell Kusy (my esteemed chair and advisor), Dr. Elizabeth Holloway, Dr. Elaine Morris Roberts, Dr. Diana Ridgwell, Dr. Laura Roberts, and my highly esteemed content expert, Dr. Roger Blackwell. Thanks for your friendship, wisdom, knowledge of the industry, personal care. Thanks for holding me accountable and continuously challenging me to conduct rigorous research. This effort is a product of their toil and contribution; any shortcoming in meeting their incredibly high standard is solely my responsibility.

Thanks to my cohort. Without you, this incredible journey would have been incomplete.

Thanks to my close association of friends, friends, family, and the fascinating lives of four amazing children I have been entrusted to raise; Dakota, Jackson, Atticus, and Liberty. You make my life so indescribably rich. Thanks to my parents, Henk and Maaike Bloemhard as well as my in-laws, Ken and Judy Shelley. Thanks to the various friends that have provided a lifetime

of unconditional support, Greg Portis in particular. The completion of this incredible effort would never have been realized without their consistent care and support.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, thanks to Bethany Merri Bloemhard—aka, my “better three-quarter.” I will be eternally grateful for your love and support.

**Abstract**

This qualitative study examined a leader's enigmatic decision-making process guiding innovative and complex organizations—organizations that are not able to rely on market research or the precedence of industry emulators for making strategic decisions. Leaders of highly creative organizations regularly make catalytic decisions that have fateful outcomes; their ability to recognize and appropriately adjudicate complex and unpredictable market forces determine the consequences. Such influential choices often require a deep level of intuition with very little research and time to decide. The purpose of this dissertation has been to develop a framework that presents Brand Leadership as a distinct and viable leadership paradigm. A claim that leadership may be best described as a way of being with comprehensive system-thinking capable of fully understanding the context in which he or she leads; the complexity of the organization and the trends of the marketplace. A Representative Case Research study, which included three brand leaders and nine ancillary interviews, was conducted and four unique contributions have been offered: First, while certainly related to marketing, brand is the higher order and requires strategic leadership. Second, the evolving role of the brand leader fulfills certain needs, including that brand leaders see the organization in the eyes of the customer; and that Brand Leadership represents an internal momentum in which customers are at the center of the organization. Third, Brand Leadership ,in fact, should be considered a unique leadership paradigm as it sees the leader's intuition as a quintessential proponent to understanding context of the organization and leading within the context of a larger marketplace. And fourth, Brand Leadership is an untapped educational frontier. 

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## Introduction

Many researchers have identified leadership as being one of the most important components to any successful business organization (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1989; Ulrich, Zenger, & Smallwood, 1999) and leadership development appears to be at its highpoint (Day, 2001). Whether it is leading a country, a county, a company or a crowd-funding campaign, "leadership is often regarded as the single most critical factor in the success or failure of institutions" (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 11). While there are literally thousands of books and articles written on the topic of leadership, the vast majority of philosophers agree upon one thing; there is no magic bullet for identifying imminent success (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007; Sirkin, Keenan, & Jackson, 2005;).

Nevertheless, this fascination with leadership has sparked an insatiable appetite that shows no sign of waning; bookstores, motivational speakers, and personal coaches have built a sizable industry supporting this infatuation. "And yet despite all this attention," A. Sinclair and Lips-Wiersma (2008) critically lament, "there is little evidence that we are getting better at it" (p. xiii). "In the globalized, hyper-connected age in which we live, one question persists in boardrooms, corner offices, business schools, and conferences all over the world: What is leadership and how has it changed in the 21st century?" (Frampton, 2013, para.1).

Leaders of highly creative organizations regularly have to make catalytic decisions that have fateful consequences; often the fate of the organization lies in their ability to recognize and appropriately adjudicate complex and unpredictable market forces. Influential leaders are required to make **a** considerable number of judgment calls that require a deep level of intuition with very little time and research data. Brand leaders need to be highly innovative, competent, and capable of deftly maneuvering corporate strategy based on their intuitive comprehension of unforeseen market forces and trends. In one of his last published books on leadership, Warren Bennis (2009) suggests that "today, in the current volatile climate, it is vital that leaders steer a clear and consistent course. They must acknowledge uncertainties and deal effectively with the present, while simultaneously *anticipating* [emphasis added] and responding to the future" (p. 155)**.**

The requirement for a leader to lead with intuition is no longer an optional criteria for contemporary leaders to successfully cope with a complex and unpredictable future; it has become a core competency requirement in order to survive in today's turbulent marketplace. Thirty years ago, in exploring this need for organizations to constantly change, innovate, and radically adapt in order to stay competitive, best-selling business author Tom Peters challenged leaders to "innovate or die" (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 2). Some contemporary theorists may assert that this battle cry is even more relevant today: "The current crisis is a wake-up call and  the current turmoil in the markets has everyone worried; some are panicking. But, like any other crisis, this one presents both threats and opportunity for what goes on inside organizations" (Amabile & Kramer, 2011, p. 80).

While the primary focus of my research was on leaders' intuitive ability to grow their company's brand through innovation, it is not innovation for the mere sake of innovation. From an organizational perspective, a successful brand leader carries the enigmatic responsibility of connecting the practical and emotional needs of the customer to the culture and capability of the organization. The intuitive process that drives this decision needs to be in alignment with context of the organization; it needs to be aligned with the corporate brand.

Intuition exists on a continuum. Many individuals involved in crisis management (e.g., police officers, military personnel, fire fighters, paramedics) resort to intuitive decision-making; yet there is a fundamental difference. Such individuals require tactical intuition, whereas innovative organizational leadership roles require *strategic* intuition. Training for intuition in tactical situations require "repeated drills [which are designed to] bring almost involuntary (intuitive) decisions and actions as a result of past learning/practice/drill so that the action becomes 'second nature'" (Patton, 2003, p. 989).

There is a suspicion that innovative leaders face a unique set of challenges as their decision making process is often more strategic and visionary (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Unlike the tactical and reactive counterparts, there is no straightforward training; there are no repeated drills designed to elicit a reliable and positive outcome. Nevertheless, these leaders are often forced to navigate unknown territory as they make decisions that will determine the survival of their organization. It takes intuition to realize a solution to undefined problem—such leaders are required to search deep within their subconscious.

Unfortunately, such non-verbal subconscious problem solving is a fragile process, easily disrupted by verbalization. Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) coined the name *verbal overshadowing* for this phenomenon. The act of verbalizing, they assert, is predominantly a left-brain activity and will shut down the right brain's ability to solve complex problems. One can only imagine the conundrum of a creative leader as he wrestles with complex problems while, at the same time, trying to articulate the thoughts he is still trying to realize.

These creative leaders must rely on their intuition to carry the burden, and considerable consequences, of their decisions. Unable to justify their conclusions with market research, since it often does not exist, the result is that many of the most successful innovative leaders have a reputation that is far removed from the textbook illustration of an evolved, post-modern leader.

This research has explored the frustrations of creative leaders, a space in which these frustrations can be discussed has been created, and has suggested methods for a leader to realize his or her full potential while employing post-modern leadership philosophies

In order to frame the discussion, definitions have been provided. There was a need to minimize the possible confusion between shifting terms that may, at first glance, appear to be quite similar, terms such as brand leadership, creative leader, and innovative leader.

**Research Question**

The goal of this exploratory research was to investigate branding as a means to further our understanding of contemporary leadership within the framework of highly creative organizations. The rationale for exploring yet another leadership theory was the need to consider context as an essential component to effective leadership. While leadership theorists acknowledge the significance of context, there is very little opportunity to include the phenomena in the majority of existing leadership theories. Leadership, as Rost (1993) described most leadership theories, "is merely a relationship between the leader and follower" (p. 13). The research question explores the possibility of presenting Brand Leadership as a distinct and viable leadership paradigm; a three-part relationship that includes the leader, the followers, and context.

> There is far too much focus on individual characteristics of leadership and far too little focus on the situational context. By placing too much emphasis on the individual, we can easily fall prey to the cult of the CEO and believe that any individual who was successful in one setting would naturally be successful in a new setting. The list of once-successful CEOs who have failed in new business settings is long. (Mayo, 2007, p. 323)

This research has investigated leaders' roles as they hold in trust the ethos of the brand; a whole-systems corporate strategy that incorporates both the pragmatic financial responsibilities as well as the intangible ethos that define an organization's destiny in the context of today's turbulent marketplace. Traditional leadership roles are converging, traditional structures are crumbling, and less tangible strengths like emotional intelligence and intuition are proving to be just as vital to leading a brand today as the ability to generate high ROIs (returns on investment) and increased shareholder value (Frampton, 2013). Many academic researchers, business writers, executives, and managers postulate intuition as the "key part of strategic decision-making effectiveness that plays a role in a firm's efforts to innovate and grow" (Miller & Ireland, 2005, p. 20). Jez Frampton CEO of Interbrand admonishes that brand leadership requires "leaving the old behind—the structures, tenets, and modes of operation suited to a world now obsolete and charting a bold new path into an unknown future that is ours to shape" (Frampton, 2013, para. 2).

Using Representative Case Research (RCR), which holds convergence of data as the key to a convincing interpretation, I have investigated the conundrum of creative leaders as they struggle to realize and communicate their full potential while navigating the complexities of an uncertain market. A paradigm shift of leadership has been offered reconciling the pragmatic struggles of intuition and branding with post-modern leadership theories.

**Researcher Positioning**

My professional career has been, in one way or another, always tied to branding. While I was completing my B.F.A. in Industrial Design, I stumbled across an award winning Retail Design firm, Chute Gerdeman, and my life was changed. I was enticed by the studio's creativity and swooned by their international clientele.

My first "real" job after graduation was with Interbrand, arguably the world's leader in branding. Using a five-step Economic Value Added methodology, Interbrand releases an annual ranking of the world's strongest brands based on financial performance, role, and strength. In order for a corporation to earn a spot among the world's "Best Global Brands," it must have a presence on a minimum of three continents, at least 30% of revenue must come from outside the home country, and no more than 50% of revenue should come from any one continent.

With nearly 40 offices in 27 countries, Interbrand offers a variety of services; the division I worked in specialized in the little known field called Retail Design. Our clients were always the strategic decision makers, the corporate level organizational leaders. Continually researching game-changing market trends, we helped identify and articulate the brand messages across a myriad of industries. As with any agency, we would spend a considerable amount of time interviewing employees and customers; often we would clarify our understanding of the organization and industry by conducting a large-scale SWOT analysis—an exercise whereby an entity examines its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

While a few of our clients were entrepreneurial start-ups, the majority had a brick-and-mortar presence and we used a series of high energy, hand drawn illustrations to articulate the proposed customer journey. The first sketch, for example, may be the proposed building as seen from the road. The second rendering may be the entrance, the third may be the customer help desk. We would continue providing sketches until the customer journey was fully realized.

Figure 1.1 is a bird's-eye perspective of a proposed ice cream "apothecary" which was never realized. One of the last sketches in a series, a bird's eye perspective is a powerful tool to demonstrate the overall layout. While it may not be the dramatic pull-you-in rendering of an entry sketch, it is another way to illustrate the space which many clients may have a hard time understanding from the blueprint.

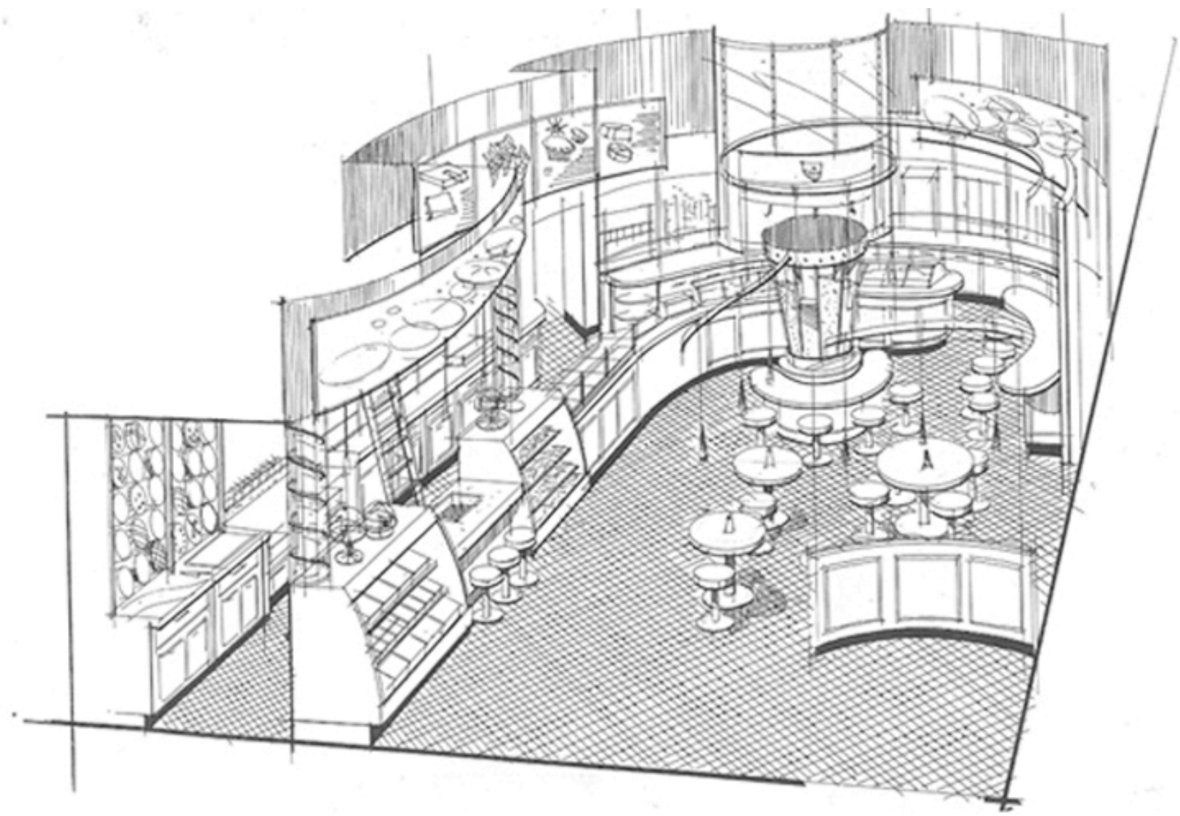

*Figure 1.1.* Personal retail design concept sketch for proposed ice cream "apothecary."

The hand drawings served two purposes. The first was to provide a rapid illustration of the concept, the second is to stimulate excitement and energy. Most of our clients would require initial design proposals from a few competing design firms and the stakes were high; excitement and energy were a requirement to winning the competition. The retail design and branding was often just the beginning; the majority of the revenue was in managing the actual construction process of the realized building.

My perspective of branding has been forged by my experience designing brand-right environments. Unlike the two-dimensional world of traditional advertising agencies, a great retail designer considers the complete customer experience and strives to capitalize on all five senses in order to do so—smell, touch, taste, sight, and hearing. I believe it was this complete customer experience which sparked an appreciation for seeing Brand Leadership as context-based leadership.

One can imagine how interesting it would be for a college graduate to discuss strategy with CEOs from a variety of Fortune 500 companies. From Fortune 500 companies to the frenzy of entrepreneurial start-ups, I have had the privilege of working on the brand campaigns of hundreds of companies, many of which are household names. I have experienced how difficult it is for the majority of leaders to articulate their vision, and I have witnessed the wildly successful results of a well-implemented brand strategy. I have observed, first hand, how branding is able to pull together a discouraged and fragmented organization into an optimistic, high-functioning machine with an immediate impact on the organization's culture and financials.

My interest in pursuing a PhD was also kindled during this formative time. There were no Retail Design or Branding undergraduate degrees available and the companies did the best that they could to refresh their talent pool. Most of the candidates came from Industrial or Interior Design programs and most had very little exposure to branding through a couple of marketing classes they were required to take. If knowledge of branding were a requirement to be hired, even though that was the actual job description, most of the college graduates (myself included) would not have gotten past the first interview.

One of my responsibilities was to help refine the designer's drawing techniques and to infuse an awareness of brand at the same time. Besides having to master a very difficult drawing technique, new hires were thrown into a fast-paced, multi billion-dollar industry with little-to-no academic foundation from which to draw. Within a short time, these recent graduates were advising Fortune 500 executives without a formal knowledge base apart from the drawing lessons of a fellow employee. Most of the new hires were simply overwhelmed.

Infatuated by our international clientele, I was, initially, a passionate ambassador of all things Retail Design and Branding. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm quickly turned to apathy as I became acutely aware of the new hire "drop out" rate. Among those who persevered, I estimate half acquired the minimum skills required to create and present a design to a client; of the 50% that remained, only a few would grow into a contributing thought leader in the Retail Design community.

The industry is riddled with, what I describe, "used car sales manager" syndrome. An accomplished salesperson automatically rises to management with the assumption that a successful sales history indicates a successful leadership future.

> In today's organizations, the demands . . . are constantly evolving—promotions, shifting responsibilities, new bosses or team members, an altered industry landscape. And if you don't evolve with them, you will fail to be effective. Yet we have seen many successful leaders wrongfully assume that they don't have to adapt. They presume that the skills and qualities that enabled previous achievements will ensure they thrive against any and all future challenges. 'After all,' they say, 'isn't this what my success is built on?' But future success is rarely built on the same platform as one's past accomplishments.
> (Su & Wilkins, 2013, p. 1)

A person who has experienced this mentality knows all too well that it is not necessarily the case. The job requirement for one position is sales; the job requirement for the next is leadership. With no formal or informal training, the result is often devastating—devastating for the company, the employee, and the employee's family. The employee often feels stuck, demoralized, or fake. Organizations lose bench strength, fail to build strong leaders, and miss out on opportunities to push to the next level (Su & Wilkins, 2013).

My position would be incomplete without telling a story—a story that began a life long journey to better understand leadership. My boss at the time was a creative director—arguably one of the most brilliant minds in retail design. In many ways our lives had taken similar paths; we were both graduates of CCAD's Industrial Design program and had both been the annual recipients of the esteemed Industrial Design Society of America Award. During a scheduled review, I asked him what he would do differently if he were in my shoes. He paused for a brief moment, got up, quietly closed the conference door and told me the following story:

A few years before, he had been given responsibility for the design studio and was on his first sales pitch. It was to design a new car dealership for a well-known car manufacturer. Eager to come home with the grand prize, he pulled out sketch after amazing sketch illustrating his brilliant retail prototype. Upon completion of his well-rehearsed presentation, he drew a deep breath and asked if there were any questions. The CEO stated that he understood that it was too early to calculate an exact ROI for each constructed prototype, but that he would appreciate an educated estimate.

My boss, not having the slightest idea what ROI meant, grabbed the floor plan, and started to discuss the layout of the facility. The CEO politely repeated his question two more times before the creative director realized he was completely backed into a corner. Defeated, he quietly whispered, "I don't know what ROI means." After a moment of stunned silence, the CEO slammed both fists on the table and with a voice full of bitter contempt he explained that ROI stood for "Return On Investment" and how it was the single most important concept in the business world. He went on to say that he thought it was an insult to ask advice from someone so ignorant; ROI was the only reason they were together and ROI was the only reason that his company would never do business with our company.

Not only did this amazing designer lose the pitch, his confidence would forevermore be rattled. If he did not know the most important concepts of business, what else was he missing? What other unknown questions would be asked in the future?

**Definitions**

If we look at the literature on organizations and strategy, we find numerous definitions for common branding terms. Some are used synonymously, some have partially overlapping meanings, and others are deliberately intended to be completely distinct.

To ensure that this study was properly framed, a few critical terms are defined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

*Key Terms and Definitions*

| **Term** | **Definition** |
|---|---|
| Creativity | The production of novel or useful ideas in any domain. |
| Innovation | The useful implementation of creative ideas within an organization. |
| Brand | Unique experience, product, design, sign, symbol, public relations, or a combination of these, that creates an image that identifies a product, experience, or organization and differentiates it from its competitors. |
| Branding | The *proactive* and *deliberate* process of creating a brand as a strategic business model; an attempt to drive all the organization's energy to reach a common goal in order to attract and retain loyal employees and customers. |
| Branding Leader | A person of significant influence in an organization who holds, in trust, the ethos of the brand. Such a leader understands the importance of branding as the lifeblood of an organization and deliberately works to create a culture that is representative of the brand. |
| Chief branding officer (CBO) | A chief branding officer (CBO) is a relatively new executive position. Typically reporting to the CEO or a board of directors, the chief branding officer is responsible for the brand's image, experience and promise. |

**Creativity.** Noted organizational psychologist, Amabile (1996) marked a distinction between tradition creativity (novel ideas presented by individuals which is very limited and limiting) and contemporary creativity that is "the production of novel and useful ideas in *any* domain" (p. 1). In order to be considered creative, a product or idea must be different from what has been done before. It "must be appropriate to the goal at hand, correct, valuable, or expressive of meaning" (p. 1).

As the founder and partner of IDEO, one of the world's leading innovation and design firms, Kelly and Kelly (2013) have argued that creativity is not some rare gift to be enjoyed by the lucky few—it is a natural part of human thinking and behavior. They implored: "We believe that our creative energy is one of our most precious resources. It can help us find innovative solutions to some of [society's] most intractable problems" (p. 6).

**Innovation.** From a customer's perspective, Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2012) have defined innovation as "any idea or product perceived by the adopter to be new. It follows then that a product innovation (or new product) is any product recently introduced to the market or perceived to be new when compared to existing products" (p. 544).

From an organizational perspective, Amabile (1996) defined innovation as the successful implementation of the creative idea. Creativity by individuals or teams, she has contended, is a good starting point but it is not necessarily a sufficient condition (p. 1).

Kelly and Kelly (2013) assert that creativity manifests itself as innovation in the business world and is "fueled by a restless intellectual curiosity, deep optimism, the ability to accept repeated failures as the price of ultimate success, a relentless work ethic, and a mindset that encourages not just ideas, but action" (p. 74).

**Brand.** In recent years, considerable attention has been given to understanding brands and branding. Unfortunately, brand, as portrayed in contemporary literature, is somewhat nebulous. If two random people were asked, one might define branding as a consistent use of a logo and colors; another may say that it is just another term for marketing. The terms are so widely used and have so many implications that it is difficult to describe one distinct action or trait.

Merriam-Webster defines brand(*n)* as:

1. a category of products that are all made by a particular company and all have a particular name,
2. a particular kind or type of something, or
3. a mark that is burned into the skin of an animal (such as a cow) to show who owns the animal. (Brand, 2005)

While that definition offers a textbook answer, one could argue that this definition is far too mechanical and narrowly focused to be relevant. One of the most recognized contemporary business theorists, Seth Godin (2009), offers a definition that may be more aligned with the current perception of the industry:

> A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another. If the customer (whether it's a business, a buyer, a voter or a donor) doesn't pay a premium, make a selection or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that customer. (para. 1)

Godin continues:

> A brand's value is merely the sum total of how much extra people will pay, or how often they choose, the expectations, memories, stories and relationships of one brand over the alternatives. (para. 2)

One may still struggle with Godin's definition as it relies so heavily on external, tangible characteristics. Naturally, there is a temptation to define a brand as the physical dimensions of an organization's people, products and place but if the definition were restricted to a checklist of tangible assets, one would have a difficult time explaining the difference between Dunkin Donuts and Starbucks.

In *A New Brand World; 8 Principles for Achieving Brand Leadership in the 21st Century*, Scott Bedbury (2003), one of the key strategists behind two of the most remarkable brand successes of all time, Nike and Starbucks, took a shot at defining brand. While one may criticize his attempt at being a bit long, it is wonderful attempt to portray the overwhelming complexity:

> A brand is the sum of the good, the bad, the ugly, and the off-strategy. It is defined by your best product as well as your worst product. It is defined by award-winning advertising as well as by the god-awful ads that somehow slipped through the cracks, got approved, and, not surprisingly, sank into oblivion. It is defined by the accomplishments of your best employee—the shining star in the company who can do no wrong—as well as by the mishaps of the worst hire you ever made. It is also defined by your receptionist and the music your customers are subjected to when placed on hold.
>
> For every grand and finely worded public statement by the CEO, the brand is also defined by derisory consumer comments overheard in the hallway or in a chat room on the Internet. Brands are sponges for content, for images, for fleeting feelings. They become psychological concepts held in the minds of the public, were they stay forever. As such you can't entirely control a brand. At best you only guide and influence it. (p. 15)

Ironically, the *value* of the brand may be easier to define; it is often the largest asset on a corporation's balance sheet. The value of Apple's brand, for example, as of 2015, was estimated to be $170.276 billion (Interbrand, 2015, p. 9).

**Branding.** For the purpose of this research, there was a significant difference between "brand" and "branding." While the "ing" suffix denotes an action, such a verb could be as simplistic as an Egyptian potter inscribing his mark on a clay vessel 5,000 years ago. For this research, I have defined branding as the proactive and deliberate process of creating a brand as a strategic business model; an attempt to drive all the organization's energy to reach a common goal in order to attract and retain loyal employees and customers. Branding has evolved from being tactical and reactive to strategic and visionary (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Lastly, brand is context based; the strategic vision is a function of the customer's needs and wants as well as the ability of the organization.

In fact, one can argue that there is an intangible threshold to the definition of the brand. If an organization, for example, does not have a strong comprehensive strategy, identity, vision and purpose, many would not consider it to even have a brand. “It is not clear why weak conceptions of [brand] are conceptions of [brand]” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 11).

**Brand leader.** Employing a broad aperture, a successful brand leader understands systems thinking and is concerned with strategy as well as tactics. The resulting brand strategy is aligned to the business strategy and reflects the vision and culture of the organization. Such context-based leadership has the ability to capitalize on the strength of the organization and identify emerging market opportunities.

**Chief brand officer (CBO).** While the ideal brand leader is the chief executive officer, today’s CEOs “run more complex organizations than ever before, under unprecedented competitive pressures, and across an increasingly global marketplace” (Welch, 2008, p. 1). CEOs tend to be groomed from non-marketing backgrounds such as finance, management consulting or engineering. While it would be great if a CEO were also able to be the principal brand ambassador, the reality is that, often, they are unable to fashion a meaningful brand experience for the customer. According to Welch, great CBOs must know how the business strategy is to affect the customer experience meaningfully.

It is interesting to note that chief brand officers are relatively new positions. The first article referencing CBOs, “Who is Your Brand Daddy? Adding a chief branding officer to Your C-Suite” was published in March 2008 (Welch, 2008) in *Brand Strategy.* In 2011, Citigroup and McDonald’s both appointed chief brand officers (Jargon, 2011; Kilner, 2011).

## Significance and Justification for Study

It was the spring of 1983 and Steve Jobs, the recently deceased, wildly eccentric, co-founder of the Apple Corporation, was preparing to launch the much-anticipated release of the Macintosh computer. Although Jobs enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for his flamboyant product unveilings, he felt that this particular introduction was unusually significant. In many ways, he perceived it as a "coming of age" for the young corporation. Not only was it a critical milestone for solidifying the corporate identity, he was determined to retain his image of being a fiercely independent leader within the industry's counterculture of technology geeks that despised corporate America. While he needed to deliver an introduction that would resonate with a larger customer group, his success was dependent on his ability to lead this world-class team of programmers that managed, time after time, to realize his insatiable demands.

The idea was to create an introduction as revolutionary and innovative as the product itself. "I want something that will stop people in their tracks," Jobs declared. "I want a thunderclap" (as cited in Isaacson, 2011, p. 162). Armed with an unprecedented budget of $750,000, Jobs recruited Ridley Scott, fresh off the success of *Blade Runner,* to direct a commercial that was to debut during the Super Bowl. Given the austere climate of the raging cold war, Jobs felt strong about building the campaign around a tagline that spoofed off of the well-known George Orwell novel: "Why 1984 won't be like *1984."*

Using a cold, industrial setting, Scott evoked the ominous ambiance of *Blade Runner* with dozens of real skinheads in dreary uniforms listening, as if completely brainwashed, to the projected message of the ideology of a conquering nation on an oversized screen. The cameras sporadically flashed back to a heroine, dressed in a white tank-top and bright orange shorts, running from a pack of uniformed guards. Through the aisle of entranced drones she charges, and just as 'Big Brother' declares "We shall prevail," she hurls a sledgehammer, shattering the image in a flash of light and smoke. In the aftermath, a simple message flashes on the screen, "On June 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."

In hindsight, the commercial was brilliant, timely, and perfectly captured the ethos of the Apple Corporation—and Steve Jobs loved it. Unfortunately, it appeared that he was the only one. When the commercial was screened it for Apple's corporate board, everyone fell silent. Philip Schlein, the CEO of Macy's, had his head resting on the conference table. Across the table Mike Markkula, a partner at Apple, simply stared in stunned silence; at first, it seemed like he was completely overwhelmed by the power of the ad. When he finally spoke, he simply asked, "Who wants to move to find a new agency?"

John Sculley, Apple's CEO at the time, recalled, "Most of them thought it was the worst commercial they had ever seen" (Isaacson, 2011, p. 163). The eccentric Steve Jobs was beside himself, collapsing into one of his full-fledged notorious temper tantrums. The commercial embodied his vision for the future of Apple and he was willing to fall on his sword in order to realize his dream. In an effort to circumvent an imminent confrontation, John Sculley asked Bill Campbell, the head of marketing, to decide what to do. In a fateful moment Campbell literally flipped a quarter and agreed to let it air.

The Super Bowl commercial was a sensational success. Apple only paid for the ad to run once, but by evening, all three networks and fifty local stations aired news stories about the ad, giving it a viral life unprecedented in the pre-YouTube era. Both *TV Guide* and *Advertising Age* would eventually select it as the greatest commercial of all time.

History is peppered with similar stories of heroic intuition that defies conventional wisdom and changes the course of history. Galileo and Newton, for example, encountered life-threatening resistance at the time of their discoveries. Lee Iacocca is accredited as the savior of the Chrysler Corporation with his insistence that America was ready for the minivan—despite all the research that suggested otherwise. And the list goes on.

**So what is intuition?** Intuition is neither the opposite of rationality, nor a random process of guessing, it corresponds to thoughts, conclusions; choices produced largely, or in part, through mental processes (Khatri & Ng, 2000). Roy Rowan, a noted intuition researcher, described the process as:

> Intuition is knowledge gained without rational thought. And since it comes from some stratum of awareness just below the conscious level, it is slippery and elusive, to say the least. . . . New ideas spring from a mind that organizes experiences, facts, and relationships to discern a [mental] path that has not been taken before. (quoted in Miller & Ireland, 2005, p. 21)

While it might be tempting to suppose such innovative leadership struggles are isolated as the burden of creative business leaders, this issue clearly affects all aspects of humanity. It would be difficult to visualize a world without the contributions of such avant-garde innovations, and it is impossible to wonder how many other equally heroic discoveries have never been fully realized. Just at the critical tipping point, their development was stymied and their ability to impact humanity forever thwarted.

In hindsight, it may be tempting to scorn the prevailing wisdom of the time—how can a perfectly intelligent individual choose to argue that the world is, *obviously*, the center of the universe?— but in the case of Apple, the struggle might appear to be a bit more understandable. The ad was dark, ominous, and Apple's board of advisors was unanimous in their position. It was not as if they felt the ad was a bit controversial, untimely, and could possibly require a few revisions; they hated everything about the commercial. In fact, the board was so far removed from the spirit of what Jobs was trying to project that many considered the confrontation as the beginning of Steve Jobs' end with Apple. In an act of desperation Jobs began to stage a coup; the board discovered his intentions and Jobs was replaced.

**A new brand world.** The memory of what the future was to bring is a humorous contradiction to what it has truly brought. In the 1970s we were sure that the future was to include flying to work and an established colony on another planet, quite possibly Mars. In the 1980s, people speculated that the USA and the USSR were to be united under a mushroom cloud and Japan would gleefully purchase the rest of the planet. The 1990s were a bit less ridiculous in their predictions, yet it was generally believed that the wealth and health of our great nation was invincible. If only life were just that simple.

The fact is that the geo-political, economical landscape has become much more complicated. Communism has all but crumbled and democracy has expressed itself in unexpected ways—not in the form of government per se, but in the open and democratic sharing of information. People who were once marginalized and remote are now being empowered in unique ways with newly available information. "The world," as Thomas Friedman (2005) has so emphatically purported, "is flat" (p. 7).

In fact, this revolutionary "flattening" of the world has brought along its own unique challenges and opportunities. In *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*, Pink (2006) continues Friedman's research to describe the seismic complexities of this new era, declaring:

> We are moving from an economy and a society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Informational Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place, the Conceptual Age. (p. 2)

New eras bring new challenges. It does not take much to realize that the world is faster, noisier, and exponentially more complicated than ever before. The demands of customers and the speed at which concepts are delivered in global markets are evolving at unprecedented speeds. In *The Paradox of Choice,* Schwartz (2004) expresses the need for choice but cautions that as a society we may have become overloaded. Excessive choice no longer liberates but in fact deliberates. Change is relentless, life is moving fast, and critical decisions are ever so confusing. "There is an infinite access to data, yet we are not always sure what to do with it" (Pink, 2006, p. 5).

These everyday choices represent a global election. The election is not necessarily about which political parties will lead a nation, but what nations, firms, and organizations fail, survive, or thrive. The vote is not counted on ballots, but with the customer's choice of time and money. With their votes, customers determine which companies have rising share prices and which go out of business. On a macroeconomic level, customers vote what work should go to China, India, Europe, or the Americas. "In the United States, customers are responsible for two-thirds of the nation's economy. They determine which nations obtain needed capital and revenue, yielding jobs and prosperity" (Blackwell et al., 2012, p. 7).

The new global customer buys the same brands, from the same types of retailers, and for the same reasons in many countries. Whether in Europe, the Americas, or Asia, researchers are using the same methods and theories to conduct research and analyze customer behavior. Even though there are differences between cultures and customer decisions, as customers grow more global, the competition will increase (Blackwell et al., 2012). It will be the nation, company, or leader, who has the ability to recognize and respond to these opportunities that has the hope of surviving in this new era.

Today, businesses around the world understand that "the customer is king." As in the illustration of Steve Jobs and the Super Bowl commercial that helped propel Apple to become the largest corporation in the world, the judge was not the corporate board, but ultimately the customer. Even after Sam Walton became a billionaire, he would walk through his stores and admonish everyone, from the cashiers to senior management that "the only person that can fire us all is the customer" (Blackwell et al., 2012, p. 8).

With the hyper-connected global customer more powerful than ever, the opportunities are substantial, yet the challenges are just as great. "When a brand makes it, it can become bigger than ever before," but as in the case of Steve Jobs' Super Bowl commercial, "you'll be hard-pushed to define its success" (Haig, 2005, p. xiii).

> After all, even the world's most successful brand—Coca Cola [worth $70 billion according to Interbrand]—does not know what exactly makes it so successful. If it did, it would be able to replicate that success with its brands of bottle water and it certainly wouldn't have come up with New Coke. (Haig, 2005, p. 1)

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Most businesses today realize that the key to growth and even survival, is innovation (Kelly & Kelly, 2013). In fact, "one recent IBM survey of more than 1,500 CEOs reports that creativity is the single most important leadership competency for enterprises facing the complexity of global competition today" (p. 4).

It is interesting to compare a similar survey conducted with the Royal Dutch-Shell Corporation. A roster of Fortune 500 companies was examined, and a startling one third of the companies listed in 1970 were no longer in business 13 years later (De Geus, 1988, p. 70). If that were the case in the mid 1980s, what would the chance of survival be in the beginning of this new century? While it is easy to discount such public failures, the truth is that those numbers were a reflection of the biggest and the best corporate America had to offer at the time. Many of those corporations were once landmarks of great leadership, providing the foundation for empirical research on effective leadership theories.

So what went wrong? With leadership "often regarded as the single most critical factor in the success or failure of institutions," (Bass & Bass, 2008, p. 11) it is only natural to turn our attention to the leadership as a potential answer to such a perplexing question.

In the past 50 years, there have been as many as 65 different classification systems developed to define the dimensions of leadership (Northouse, 2015). Most organizational theorists agree that an essential component of leadership is measured by performance in meeting predetermined objectives (Fleishman et al., 1991) and "directing attention to a group of individuals who have a common purpose and are collectively grouped to accomplish some task or goal" (Northouse, 2015, p. 3).

However, as Heifetz (1994) in *Leadership Without Easy Answers* clearly illustrates, the identification of such tasks or goals are often difficult to identify. Heifetz postulates that the identification is further exacerbated by the complex and dubious state of affairs in which most leadership crises occur. Organizations are becoming more and more fragile as strategic decisions are subject to an unprecedented vulnerability. Now, more than ever before, business leaders are being forced to guide their organizations through uncharted territory with very little time or research to make decisions that have the ability to make or break their organizations. "Business, as usual," exhort Amabile and Kramer (2011), "just won't cut it [and the leaders] may get motivated to radically rethink their approach to managing" (p. 80).

**Corporations need to innovate.** In the wake of the 2008 economic apocalypse, one can understandably criticize the stock market for putting too much pressure on leaders to prove their worth by growth at any cost. While the truth of such an understanding may or may not have validity, many business theorists postulate that such growth is, in actuality, a requirement for mere survival. It is a little known fact that capitalism, the same driving force that recognizes and rewards innovation, relentlessly demands that companies do not just grow, but grow faster. While the vast majority may understand that the value of a stock is speculative, many do not realize that an increase to the stock's performance is the result of exceeding those financial speculations.

Therefore, it is inaccurate to associate shareholders' returns with mere growth. Profits are maximized when a company is able to outperform the investor's speculation, which includes growth as a minimum expectation. Investors have an uncanny tendency to discount into the present value of a stock the rate of growth they optimistically project the organization is able to sustain. Even if a company is growing at an impressive pace, the only way the leaders can deliver a higher return on investment is to deliver more and faster than what is expected. Positive reactions in stock prices are realized by the unexpected positive changes to the company's projected earnings and cash flow.

If an organization is doing all it can to maximize its projected earnings and cash flow, then maintaining the historic performance is a very tall order; to increase a shareholder's return is often all too daunting and, some may argue, destined for failure. Consequently, empirical research suggests that a mere one tenth of all publically traded companies are able to sustain growth that translates into above-average increase in shareholder returns (C. Christensen & Raynor, 2003; Collins, 2001; Foster & Sarah, 2001; Zook & Allen, 2001).

It is the weight of these expectations that burdens a leader struggling to maximize shareholders' gain (Rappaport & Mauboussin, 2001). A possible solution to this conundrum may be to increase the growth trajectory through "brand-right" leadership—context based leadership that has the ability to capitalize on the strength of the organization and identify emerging market opportunities. After all, it is the relentless drive for progress that impels change and forward movement—a critical component of successful companies (Collins & Porras, 1996).

Charles Darwin, often credited for inspiring the fundamental law of organizational survival, claims that it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change, making the study of innovation as exciting as any field one can study. Amazon founder, Jeff Bezos, put it this way:

> If you think of [innovation] in terms of the Gold Rush, then you'd be pretty depressed right now because the last nugget of gold would be gone. But the good thing is, with innovation, there isn't a last nugget. Every new thing creates two new questions and two new opportunities. (as cited in Hendrickson, 2015, p. 237)

**The Golden Rule of business.** Unfortunately, guaranteed success is no longer a function of injecting more capital into a new initiative. Many leaders have painfully realized that the well-known parody of the Golden Rule, "He who has the gold makes the rule" no longer applies. Steve Jobs opined:

> Innovation has nothing to do with how many R & D dollars you have. When Apple came up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R & D. It's not about money. It's about the people you have, how you're led, and how much you get it. (as cited in Hendrickson, 2015, p. xix)

Consider AT&T. In the aftermath of the government-mandated divestiture of its local telephony services in 1984, AT&T primarily became a long distance telecommunications services provider. The break-up liberated the organizations to invest in new initiatives, and management immediately began seeking avenues for growth. Their first such attempt to grow emerged from a shared view that computer systems and telephone networks was going to converge. AT&T first tried to build its own computer division but was not able to do any better than a loss of $200 million per year.

Deciding that it might be better to acquire the expertise, they gambled on a much larger bet, purchasing National Cash Register (NCR) in 1991 for $7.4 billion. After losing another $2 billion trying to make it work, AT&T sold NCR for $3.4 billion, recapturing a mere third of their overall investment.

Undaunted, the company was still determined to grow. In 1994, AT&T spent $15 billion on McCaw Cellular and eventually sold it in 2000 for $10.6 billion. Publically humiliated and smitten, the company took one more leap of faith acquiring TCI and Media One for a combined price tag of $112 billion in 1998. Two years later, AT&T sold their cable assets to Comcast for $72 billion (C. Christensen & Raynor, 2003).

Blinded by their determination to increase shareholder's value, AT&T lost approximately $50 billion in little more than a decade. While an entire generation of PhD students can spend their academic lives debating what went wrong, the fact remains: organizational success is no longer merely a function of dumping more money into an idea that is not "brand-right"; the strength of the organization and identify emerging market opportunities were not properly considered—regardless of a seemingly unlimited marketing budget.

"Great advertising," admonish Blackwell and Stephan (2001) "only accelerates the demise of bad products, [faulty strategies], or poorly executed services" (p. 7).

**The need for speed.** If the demands for realizing shareholder's profitability were not challenging enough, research strongly indicates that timing is an essential component to any business strategy. With the global playing field being "leveled," (Friedman, 2005) many manufacturers have access to the same technology required to produce the same innovative products. In direct proportion to the unprecedented resources available, decisions are being leveraged to affect more people, money, land, and resources than ever before (Barabba & Zaltman, 1991). And just as our ability to access information and resources has grown, so has the speed required in making such decisions; timing has become one of the most important components to building a successful brand.

To compete in today's global market, many game-changing decisions need to be made with very little market research. In order for an innovative idea to be successful, it needs to be implemented and introduced as the first in a respective category (Bain, 1954; Ries & Ries, 2000). Many contemporary business philosophers postulate that "analysis paralysis" has stunted or even completely obstructed the success of a brand's eventual success. In spite of their large resources, large organizations often lack a sense of urgency when it comes to introducing new products or ideas (Collins, 2001; Ries & Ries, 2000).

Consider Priceline.com, for example. It went from start up to market leadership of a new category with a market value of $7.9 billion, in less than two years. (Ries & Ries, 2000). It would take longer than that for most corporations to do the appropriate endless testing, focus groups, and endless market surveys required to consider investing. Despite the enormous financial, political, and knowledge resources of Fortune 500 organizations, many of the most successful Internet sites are launched by small, venture-capital backed companies.

"Maybe we are relatively late, "said Rupert Murdock, CEO of News Corp. when he tried to explain the company's first failed Internet investment, "but only by a year or two" ("Murdoch Wedded," 1999, p. 26).

**The diffusion process.** The most important contribution to the study of new innovation was Everett Rogers' seminal research in 1962. "Diffusion" he defines, "is the process by which an innovation (or new idea) is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system (Rogers, 1983, p. 37). Using this definition, a product may be around for a long time but still be perceived as new in a given market. The Internet, for example, was introduced in 1969 but was considered new in many markets as late as the 1990s (Blackwell et al., 2012).

Rogers' (1983) research identifies product characteristics and other variables that influence the diffusion process and explains how customers individually adopt new products and innovations:

- Diffusion of information and communication—involves the communication between a customer and an organization, a marketer, or a group or personal influencer.
- Customer decision process for an innovation—the process by which an individual customer decides to adopt or reject an innovation.
- Diffusion of innovation or demise of innovation—the cumulative effect of how many customers either adopt or reject an innovation over time, leading to its diffusion or demise in the marketplace. (as cited in Blackwell et al., 2012, p. 552)

**Human resistance.** Regrettably, research suggests that a majority of corporate changes, as with the case of AT&T, end in bitter disappointment. Beer and Nohria (2000) hypothesize that "the brutal fact is that about 70% of all change initiatives fail" (p. 15). And Burnes (2004), who has conducted an extensive review of leadership and change literature, suggests that such a dismal statistic may even be higher. While all the marketing data may convincingly persuade an executive board that the campaign's strategic initiative is theoretically flawless and infallible, many researchers suggest that the main obstacle to organizational change may be, in fact, human resistance (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Peters and Waterman (1982) underscore this by their own conclusion of American companies that display the time-proven basics of excellence: "quick action, service to customers, practical innovation, and the fact that you can't get any of these without virtually everyone's commitment" (p. 17).

While many of these systemic changes appear to be strategic and operationally sound, the challenge is getting everyone "marching to the beat of the same drum." Perhaps this difficult-to-define human resistance is simply the inability to connect on a meaningful level. Effective communication is a highly subjective matter and the timeless mantra—the first step is acknowledging you have a problem—might best describe the situation. In a study of 164 Fortune 500 companies, CEOs were asked to evaluate communication within their organization. The surveys showed that 97% of the CEOs believe their communication affects employee job satisfaction and 75% believe it (positively) affects employee job performance (Larkin & Larkin, 1994).

It is becoming increasingly more difficult to articulate a clear message in today's saturated market and effective communication is a key component to any leadership initiative. Employees do not live in the sterile test tubes of a corporate laboratory and are subject to an unprecedented amount of information in all aspects of their lives. Subsequently, the ability to cut through the relentless noise and confusion is getting more and more difficult each year; it is estimated that the average customer is exposed to 9% more commercial messages each consecutive year. Research indicates that in 1965 a customer group had the ability to recall 34% of the ads shown on TV. In 1990, the same customer group remembered only 8% (Shenk, 1998, p. 43).

According to one of the world's leading market intelligence agencies, close to 240,000 new products released in 2010 (that is approximately 650 new products per day) people are getting inundated with new messages on an unprecedented level (Jaeger &MacFie, 2010). In fact, it is estimated that the number of different items in a typical American supermarket has doubled every ten years since the 1970s (Cross, 2000). Unfortunately, with such a saturated market, it is not so difficult to understand how a majority of new product launches are doomed to fail. As

Americans, we are faced with a myriad of choices in politics, food, religion, sex, friendship, parenting, cell phone carriers; the list is unnerving, unending, and continuously expanding (Schwartz, 2004).

Haig (2005) suggests, an organization's failure

> is usually the fault of the brand, not the product itself. If nothing was branded, every product within a category would stand an equal chance of success: hamburgers would just be hamburgers, running shoes would just be running shoes, dark cola-flavored carbonated water would just be dark cola-flavoured carbonated water. So the difference between success and failure rests not with the brand, but with the product. (p. xiii)

The moment a brand is launched, the odds are staked against it. Each new brand either has to try to wean customers away from its competitors, or it has the even harder task of trying to create a market all by itself. The result is that nine out of ten times brands fail (Haig, 2005).

As with most corporations, customers are experiencing a personal time famine as they attempt to deal with their personal and professional needs, sort out their purchase options, and attend to multiple and in some cases competing responsibilities (Coulter & Zaltman, 1995). Schwartz (2004) emphatically describes how choice is essential to autonomy—which is absolutely fundamental to wellbeing—yet the choice overload is getting out of control.

The overload of choice is crippling. Everything has become a decision and the stress of it all is steadily creeping into every aspect of our lives. People are getting calloused, cynical, and are understandably "shutting off"; tired of being continuously sold. In a desperate attempt to create a connection, corporations are continually looking for new ways to interact with their customer group, their employees, and their shareholders. The fast-talking used car salesman of yesterday is being replaced by car dealers such as AutoNation USA and CarMax; low stress environments where the shopper is in control and salaried representatives merely assist in the decision making process.

As the $9 billion market research industry continues to grow the initial task of marketing remains eerily the same as it always has been—it is the search for new and improved ways to cut through the mayhem of irrelevant noise and relentless competition. In *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding,* Ries and Ries (2002) write that they envision a time where the hard-sell marketing concepts of yesterday will become obsolete, replaced by branding. Perhaps such a time is closer than one may think. Doug Degn, executive vice president of food merchandising at Wal-Mart agrees, "We don't consider ourselves as selling products to customers; we consider ourselves buying agents for our customers" (as cited in Blackwell & Stephan, 2001, p. 112). "Today most products are bought, not sold" (Ries & Ries, 2000, p. 2).

When it is time for leaders to articulate a new direction, it is clear that the task of breaking through the chaos and noise is a critical, yet formative, one. While leaders may work hard to establish a new corporate direction at a corporate level, their strategy is doomed to failure if they are unable to communicate a clear, relevant, and consistent message.

**Branding leadership is not a concern limited to retail organizations.** This need for a strong brand awareness is not specific to retail organizations. In the last decade, all the rules of business have changed. Traditional corporate structures have all but crumbled, the voice of the customer is more powerful than ever, and a leader's role is continually evolving; emotional intelligence and proven intuition are now the denomination of contemporary leadership, all but replacing the ability to generate high ROI.

**The recent introduction of chief branding officer (CBO).** Shareholders and governing boards are recognizing the need to create a strong brand and are, more than ever before, demanding brand awareness at the highest levels of the organization. Recently, some notable organizations have recognized the need for a stronger commitment to branding and have established a chief brand officer (CBO) position as a new addition to the C-level executives. Typically reporting to the CEO or directly to the board of directors, the chief brand officer traditionally oversees marketing, advertising, design, public relations, customer experience, and customer service.

Ideally, the brand is championed by the leader—consider Steve Jobs from Apple or Anita Roddick of The Body Shop—but in most cases, the CEO has a "left-brain" approach stemmed from a solid finance, management consulting, or engineering background. "Today's chief executives run more complex organizations than ever before, under unprecedented competitive pressures, and across an increasingly global marketplace" (Welch, 2008, p. 2). This is not to say that CEOs cannot, or should not, become the brand's principal and, subsequently, the most powerful ambassador, but they cannot be responsible for all the processes and levels necessary to fashion the brand experience for customers.

Likewise, a chief marketing officer's (CMO) "right-brain" position is just as diverse and includes sales management, product development, distribution channel management, public relations, advertising, design, marketing communications, pricing, market research, customer service and so on. While they are often the creative voice of the organization, they are grounded in the technical world; they need to be able to use any and all contemporary means to proactively reach out to the potential shareholder.

> The CBOs must turn the mundane touch points of the brand experience into magical and memorable ones. They must be the engine of innovation to meet a customer's unmet needs. They must be courageous and intuitive. They must seek out the details that create difference, which, in turn, can create customer preference.
>
> The CBOs must walk in the customer's shoes. They must feel what the customer feels, see what they see, hear what they hear, everywhere, quite literally. They must witness the entire brand experience—not just outputs of isolated channels from the marketing department—but the whole business strategy to know how to affect that experience meaningfully. The CBO should be the voice for brand synergy across the entire

> experience. Brand cohesion does not happen by serendipity. Most importantly, the CBO needs to be the voice for the customer within an organization. (Welch, 2008, p. 2)

**Research Criteria for Evaluation**

Four concepts have been commonly used to establish the quality of any empirical social research: trustworthiness, credibility, conformability, and data dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009). The third chapter will elaborate on the specific techniques for meeting and exceeding each criterion.

**Organization of Research**

The second chapter is a literature review dedicated to framing leadership as it relates to branding. A critical analysis of the literature will be provided, comparing and contrasting the general concepts.

The third chapter will begin with a discussion of my philosophy in research methodology and potential biases I bring to the study. Representative Case Research will be introduced and I will explain why this method was the best option for my inquiry. As with all qualitative research, it is not required to collect data from everyone in a community in order to obtain purposeful findings; only a sample of a population is selected for the most rigorous research. The participants, or co-investigators in this case, were veteran consultants with experience leading branding efforts of a myriad of organizations across a variety of industries.

The fourth chapter provides the results of my research and the fifth offers a discussion that includes my contribution in terms of knowledge creation; a critical analysis of the field will be provided and implications of the study may suggestion further research. Personal reflections have been provided, what I have learned and how this research has, and will, change my own worldview and personal practice.

## Literature Review

The importance of building a strong brand as a primary goal of many organizations has been recognized in the marketing literature for quite some time (D. Aaker, 1996; Berry, 1988; Hoeffler & Keller, 2002; Keller, 2001; Perrier, 1997). The understanding is that an organization that builds a strong brand will realize higher earnings and will be more stable in its marketplace performance. Such a perspective has been widely supported by both marketing scholars and marketing executives (D. Aaker, 1996; Kerin & Sethuraman, 1998; Morris, 1996).

The purpose of this study is to present a framework that defines Brand Leadership as a distinct and viable new paradigm in the greater context of contemporary leadership scholarship. The research will explore the creative decision making process of leaders with heightened sensitivity to market forces, and who possess the ability to envision and pursue organizational strategies that are aligned with emerging market trends. In order to lead in such a capacity, such a leader must fully understand the context in which he or she leads; the capability of the organization, the trends of the market ,and must be able to connect on an emotional level to all the shareholders of the organization.

Rost (1993) defines the postindustrial paradigm, portraying leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p. 99). He describes leadership as a two-part relationship—the leader and the follower. The intention of this research is to open the leadership conversation—to deliberately include a critical third part, the context. A leadership paradigm that explains how an innovative leader can realize the full potential of their organization, while respecting post-modern leadership theories, will be suggested.

**Literature Review Methodology**

In this chapter, I will present a review of the existing literature on branding, Brand Leadership, and post-modern leadership paradigm. The search will explain why this study is important, how Brand Leadership has been defined and examined, how Brand Leadership complements other postmodern leadership theories and how it is unique.

I have developed this literature review based on a Boolean search using a combination of terms relating to leadership, intuition, and branding.

A Venn diagram illustrates the search terms and efforts (Figure 2.1).

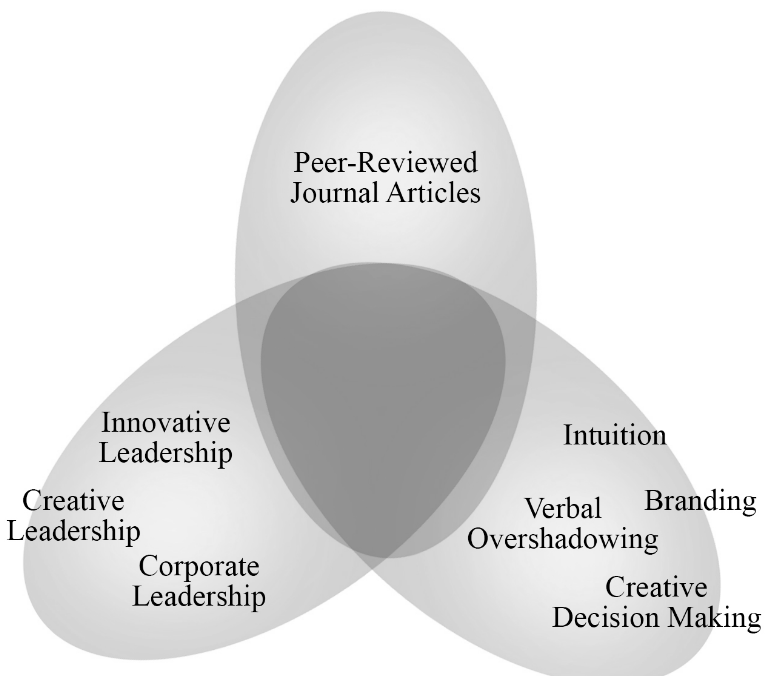


*Figure 2.1.* Venn diagram illustrating Boolean search strategy.

Once I felt comfortable that the terminology represented our interest, I proceeded with a 4-step search approach:

1. Subject searching in traditional bibliographic subject indexes

2. Mining the citations

3. Deep journal searching

4. Searching industry specific resources

A Boolean search that incorporates such a plethora of generic phrases could have easily resulted in an insurmountable pile of irrelevant articles and so the search began with a search constrained to a single bibliographic index. PsychINFO (PI), an abstract database that provides systematic coverage of the psychological literature from the 1800s to the present, was the most relevant database for the preliminary search.

The second search was much more comprehensive: bibliographic databases of PsychINFO, ABI/Inform Global, Business Source Complete (BSC), Communication and Mass Media Complete, and EBSO Host were used. The most difficult challenge was inconsistency in the use of generic phrases (branding, corporate identity, internal marketing, re-branding and rebranding, corporate personality, corporate branding, brand orientation, brand vision, and brand implementation, for example). With such a wide selection of articles, it was necessary to filter out the irrelevant ones. There were surprisingly numerous articles, for example, which dealt with issues such as co-branding, that were not relevant for this study. A few articles explored the assessment, or the goodwill calculation, of the brand. While such a topic is of considerable significance, it is out of context of this assignment. For example, there were quite a few articles on the culture of branding as it had to do with the physical act of burning symbols onto the body.

The final strategy, industry specific resources*,* was a critical step. Because of the lack of academic support for Brand Leadership—as of May 2014 there was not a single bachelor's degree available in branding—it was necessary to include industry specific resources. The advantage of the methodology that I am proposing, Representative Case Research (RCR), is that it acknowledges that empirical data can be obtained from multiple data streams and contends that "convergence of the data is the key to a convincing interpretation" (Meara, 1990, p. 68).

**A Brief History of Branding**

Historians trace branding to the 1400s when Great Britain required bread makers, goldsmiths, and silversmiths to put their trademarks on goods they manufactured; a requirement to insure honest measurement. Between the 1600s and 1800s, branding began to be used on criminals as a form of punishment and identification. It was common to identify runaway slaves were branded with an "S" on their cheek, while the Puritan settlements of the 17th century marked convicted adulterers with an "A" on their chest.

And yet branding goes back even further. According to historians, branding has been in existence for over 7,000 years—possibly more. As far back as 1300 BC, potter marks were used in China, Greece, Rome and India. The practice of branding of cattle and livestock goes as far back as 2000 BC and archaeologists have found evidence of branding as a marketing tool among Babylonians dating back to 3000 BC (Carratu, 1987).

Over time, the process of branding was developed as a competitive advantage. In the beginning of the industrial revolution, companies such Campbell's, Heinz and Quaker Oats were growing concerned about the customer's perception, and potential rejection, of mass-produced, factory-generated goods. By personifying the product, branding was able put the 19th century shoppers' minds at rest. In the past, they may have trusted the familiar face of the neighborhood shopkeeper, but now trust could be placed in the brands themselves; from the smiling faces of Uncle Ben or Aunt Jemima. The failure of mass-produced items that the factory owners had dreaded never happened. The brands had saved the day (Haig, 2005).

Customer-packaged goods companies such as Proctor & Gamble, General Foods and Unilever developed brand management, or an understanding of the target customer as a tool to identify a product from competitors. This understanding led retailers to offer products that offered not only functional but emotional value as well. As long as the brand was perceived to offer superior value to its competitors, the company offering the brand could charge a premium. If this price increase was bigger than the cost of building a brand—the additional staff and often advertising costs—the company came out ahead.

The 1950s and 1960s marked the start of almost 50 years of marketing where the brand champions were determined by understanding the customer better than the competition. Branding became much more than a logo or the price of a product. It became the packaging, the promotions, the advertising and the personalities that endorsed it.

**Brands in Trouble**

Fast-forward to the 21st century and it is not difficult to conclude that brands have become a victim of their own success. In general, organizations have discovered that they are no longer able to manufacture a high quality product, package it in a non-descript box, label the content and hope to enjoy success—the competition is simply too great. Haig (2005) observes:

> some business books rabbit on about success as if it is something that can be cooked up by following a few basic instructions and adding a few basic ingredients. They don't want to dishearten their readers by giving them the truth: a brand—*any* brand—is always more likely to fail than succeed. (p. xxiii)

Haig (2005) argues that product launch failure "is usually the fault of the brand, not the product itself" (p. xiii). Haig contends that if every product were branded equally, every product within a category would stand an equal chance of success: "hamburgers would just be hamburgers, running shoes would just be running shoes, dark cola-flavored carbonated water would just be dark cola-flavoured carbonated water. So the difference between success and failure rests not with the product, but with the brand" (Haig, 2005, p. xiii).

The moment a brand is launched, the odds are stacked against it. Each new brand either has to try to wean customers away from its competitors, or it has the even harder task of trying to create a market all by itself. The result is that nine out of ten times brands fail" (Haig, 2005).

> Each year customer-product makers in the United States introduce more than thirty thousand new products and services. That's thirty thousand opportunities to introduce another Southwest Airlines, another Swiffer, another Google, and another Gatorade. And that's just the customer side of the street. On the industrial side, U.S. companies introduce as least that many new products and services with corresponding opportunities to introduce another Adobe, another FedEx, another Gulfstream, another Oracle.
> (Ries & Ries, 2005, p. 12)

The 1980s marked a turning point in the concept of branding when management came to realize that the principal asset of a company *was* the brand (Kapferer, 2004). When brand equity became the hot business trend in the 1980s, it may have seemed like another management fad that would last only a few years (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2009). Instead, "one industry after another has discovered that brand awareness, perceived quality, customer loyalty and strong brand associations and personality are necessary to compete in a today's marketplace" (p. ix).

There is a seismic shift in the world of business—a shift from selling to buying. This shift is enhanced, accelerated, and caused by the rise of brands that "presells" the product or service to the user. The old expression, "Nothing happens until somebody sells something" is being replaced by today's slogan: "Nothing happens until somebody brands something" (Ries & Ries, 2002, p. 3).

Gone are the days of high-pressure salesmanship on a car lot. Today, brand-name lots such as AutoNation USA and CarMax have replaced many of the automotive salespeople. In a low-pressure environment, with thousands of cars to choose from, shoppers decide which one to buy with minimum help from salaried representatives. The car lot, once the finagling bane of our society, is becoming much more like a Wal-Mart supercenter. Products are stocked in depth, artfully arranged and reasonably priced, but never "sold."

> Some organizations, such as hospitals, oil field suppliers, and software firms are discovering brands for the first time. Others, such as banks, packaged-goods marketers, and automobile manufacturers are realizing that they need to revitalize their brands and their brand management system to keep pace with the ever-changing competitive scene. Powerful forces are fueling this continuing interest in brands. Overcapacity, vicious price competition, the proliferation of similar products, and powerful retailers are only some of the factors that make brand building imperative; in fact, the alternative is not only unpleasant but unhealthy for most manager's careers. (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. ix)

To better understand the complexity of the customer's needs, questionnaires were designed and focus groups were moderated. Hypotheses were tested; variables identified and eliminated, statistics were examined and more controlled experiments were suggested. Results were concluded and generalized findings were rigorously examined and re-examined in the hopes of better understanding, predicting and even controlling the fickle nature of the targeted demographics.

It was assumed that all the effort would result in an increase of customer loyalty or brand equity, leading to future sales opportunities and favorable pricing premiums (Keller, 2001). "Brands, it seems, alongside ownership of copyright and trademarks, computer software and specialist know-how, are now at the heart of the intangible value investors place on companies" (R. Sinclair, 2004, p. 4). Over time, the financial community officially recognized the value of an organization's brand, referring to the powerful phenomenon as "goodwill", ascribing to it—in some cases, as Figure 2.2 illustrates—billions of dollars on a company's balance sheet.

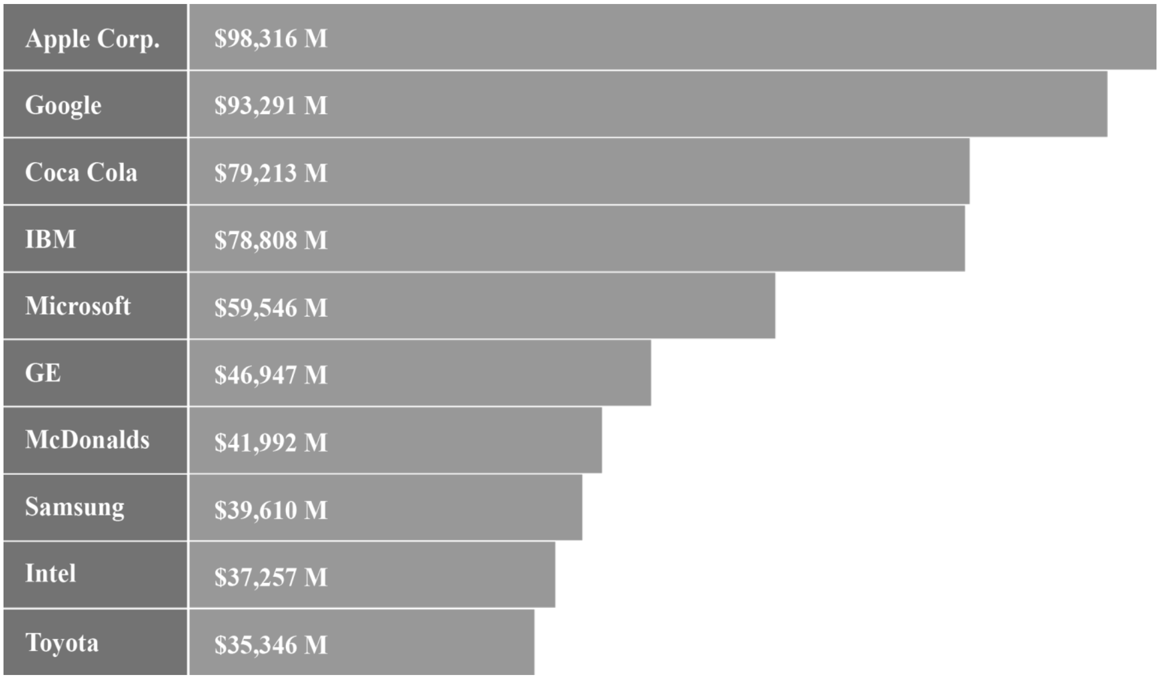


*Figure 2.2*. Value of the world's greatest brands of 2013 (based on Interbrand, 2014).

**What Is a Brand?**

Ries and Ries (2002) suggest that a brand is nothing more than a word in the mind of a customer,albeit a special kind of word. Patagonia, for example, is a brand name for a high-end adventure clothing line, but it is also a brand name for the tourist industries of Argentina and Chile. Brands are not limited to the 1,200,000 trademarks registered with the U.S. government, nor are they limited to the other multi-million names and logotypes registered with other countries around the world (Ries & Ries, 2005).

Adamson (2006) suggests that a brand is "the creation of signals that convey what your brand stands for and establishes its difference in people's minds. A brand is the idea and branding is the transmission of the idea" (p. 18). He continues:

> It is important to identify something that establishes that your product or service is different and relevant and make it simple to understand, and you've got a brand idea. If you think about the best way to express this idea and you'll have a brand strategy. Create good signals and you have got good branding. Align it with your business strategy, deliver on it, and you have got a winner. (p. 25)

Blackwell and Stephan (2004) contend that branding,

> is about seizing the increased profits that accompany greater share—from market share and closet share to share of wallet, time, and attention. Ultimately, it can also be viewed as share of heart, signifying the emotional connection between brand and fan that permits a premium price. (p. 29)

Haig (2005) concurs that branding may be the difference between success and failure of any product launch, albeit it automotive, fashion, culinary or even a political campaign. Customers now make buying decisions based around the perception of the brand rather than the reality of the product. Scott Bedbury (2003), the former marketing executive of Starbucks controversially contends, “customers don’t truly believe that there is a huge difference between actual products” (p. 36). The “huge difference” between a product launch’s success and failure is the brand.

The early history of Federal Express illustrates this subtle, yet significant, difference in branding. When Federal Express was founded, it tried to compete with the leader in air cargo, Emery Air Freight by undercutting price. Each of Federal Express’ three services (overnight, two-day, and three-day) was priced lower than the comparable service at Emery. Within a short period of time, it was clear that Federal Express was headed for imminent failure.

The founder, Fred Smith, then switched his marketing efforts to reflect a highly branded, client-centric approach. He narrowed the focus to overnight delivery and increased his advertising budget by 500% using the company tagline, “When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.” The turnaround was astonishing. In a short time, the rebranded FedEx went on to dominate the overnight-delivery business and became a much larger company than Emery. The irony is that FedEx, much like its competitor, never gave up its two-day and three-day services; through a powerful rebranding campaign they just were able to create a stronger perception (Ries & Ries, 2005).

While this means that brands can become more valuable than their physical assets, it also means that they can lose this value overnight. Haig (2005) cautions, "After all, perception is a fragile thing" (p. 1).

**Introduction of Brand Management**

Corporations were fascinated by the phenomenon that people would pay more for a branded product on the basis of mere perception. In the frenzy of understanding this enigma, corporations began hiring brand managers. Once a product was introduced, the brand manager was challenged to maximize profitability by observing competitor activity as well as internal sales and margin trends. If a problem was detected, the brand manager was to identify the issue and offer a solution to upper management. The brand manager, often a junior executive with a short-term financial perspective, was usually limited to a single product and in a single territory or country. The extent of a brand manager's influence on the business model was limited, tactical, and reactive (D. Aaker & Joachimstheraler, 2000).

The companies that recognized, introduced, and supported the role of brand managers did very well. Many companies such as P&G, The Limited, and The GAP built customer-based empires largely on their brand manager's ability to monitor the success of an individual product—in fact some would argue that they became too successful. In his best-selling book, *The Paradox of Choice; Why More is Less*, Barry Schwartz (2004) addresses the choices Americans face in almost areas of life: education, career, friendship, sex, romance, parenting and religious observance. While "there is no denying that choice improves the quality of our lives . . . choice is essential to autonomy" (p. 3), Schwartz argues that too much choice is debilitating; the multitude of options escalates until the overload becomes a sort of "tyranny" (p. 3).

This crippling overload of choice is apparent in every aspect of life. Describing a day at a local, average-size, supermarket, Schwartz (2004) attempts to illustrate the overload of choices that are a part of every day life.

> In the pharmaceutical aisles, I found 61 varieties of suntan oil and sunblock, and 80 different pain relievers—aspirin, acetaminophen, ibuprofen: 350 milligrams or 500 milligrams; caplets, capsules, and tablets; coated or uncoated. There were 40 options of toothpaste, 150 lipsticks, 75 eyeliners, and 90 colors of nail polish from one brand alone. There were 116 kinds of skin cream, and 360 types of shampoo, conditioner, gel, and mouse. Next to them were 90 different cold remedies and decongestants. Finally, there was dental floss: waxed and unwaxed, flavored and unflavored, offered in a variety of thicknesses. (p. 10)

A typical supermarket, Schwartz claims, offers more than 30,000 products. More than 20,000 new products are introduced each year—the majority of those are doomed for failure.

One can argue that excessive choice is reflective of the rampant individualism among customers. Perhaps that is true, however, such a discussion is out of the scope of this research.

**Brand as personality.** This crippling over-load of choice has had a conspicuous effect on marketing—in almost all markets customers have become more confident, more willing to experiment, and more apt to trust their own judgment. They have more disposable income and wealth than ever before and have an even greater understanding of marketing, advertising, public relations, and direct response.

Marketers began to realize that people are not variables manipulated in the test tubes of a sterile laboratory—that they are not “customer demographics;” they are dynamic individuals in search of personal fulfillment. They are searching for the “full life”—one in which they find meaning and culture in everything they do and buy and have little tolerance for products and services that do not contribute to their own values (King, 1973).

The discourse of brand as connectors naturally evolved into the need to create an engaging experience: a product or an experience that “speaks to the customer on a personal, emotional gut level . . . a product that will win the hearts of customers" (Feig, 1997, p. 18). As early as 1958, Martineau coined the term *brand personality* to refer to the intangible dimensions that make a shopping environment unique—its character (Meenaghan, 1995). It was clear that brand was becoming an extension or an expression of one's self—or at least a reflection of one's choices in life. Tucker (1967) argued that customers' personalities can be defined through product use, "There has long been an implicit concept that customers can be defined in terms of either the products they acquire or use or in terms of the meanings products have for them or their attitudes towards products" (p. 39).

In 1970, Stephen H. V. King—a leading authority in the field of advertising— wrote that, "People chose their brands the same way they choose their friends: in addition to the skills and physical characteristics, they simply like them as 'people'" (as cited in Lannon & Baskin, 2011, p. 268). The brand personality of Levi's 501 jeans, for example, is defined as "American, western, ordinary, common, blue collar, hard working and traditional" (J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995, p. 393). In the struggle to understand personality as a construct of branding, many theorists have relied on the writing of Freud who considered personality to be something dynamic, cumulative, and above all, he viewed it as being durable and relatively stable over time (as cited in Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

In the mid-1990s the interest of brand as a personality experienced a bit of an academic revival. J. Aaker and Fournier (1995) suggested a revolutionary scale for understanding brand personality, stimulating significant discourse and subsequent scales. Brand personality, according to her, is formally defined as, "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347) and is measurable. The quantifiable research was seminal—evidence shows that most of the ensuing research on brand personality is based on J. Aaker and Fournier's original scale (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

The brands of the 21st century have transformed marketing; perception is everything. Take a commodity such as bottled water, for example. Since almost everyone in America has access to clean tap water, there is really no pressing need to purchase water from a store, but many still do. In fact, Evian has done such a remarkable job building their brand that people are willing to pay 20% more for their water than for Budweiser beer, 70% more than for Borden's milk and 80% more than Coca-Cola.

Because of branding, blue jean buyers pay $100 or more for a pair of Replay, Big Star, or Diesel Jeans (Ries & Ries, 2005). The customer "who wears a Rolex watch doesn't do so to be more punctual. The customer who wears a Rolex watch does so to let other people know that he or she can afford to buy a Rolex watch" (Ries & Ries, 2002, p. 61). "That's the power of branding" (Haig, 2005, p. 152).

**More Than Brand Management Needed: Leadership Required**

The customer's demand for products and services that reflect their own values pressured corporations to adapt. Companies began to realize that brand was not an isolated function of a junior executive with a short-term financial perspective but is the requirement of a leader with a much broader scope, a leader who possessed the systems thinking approach that was able to identify and articulate the values that customers requested—and insist that the corporation maintains an appropriate level of transparency. For many corporations, the role of branding shifted from external, tactical, and reactive to internal, strategic, and visionary (D. Aaker & Joachimstheraler, 2000).

This expression of branding which is internal, strategic and visionary needs to be held, in trust, by the top ranks of the organization. David Packard, cofounder of Hewlett-Packard famously declared, “marketing is too important,” to be left to the marketing people” (as cited in Ries & Ries, 2005, p. xxiv).

**Brand as a means of effective communication.** Shifting to a leadership role that is internally focused, strategic, and visionary is becoming a minimum requirement for today’s leader. Collins and Porras (1991) advise,

> The few truly great companies have known for years—in some cases for over a hundred years—the importance of having a vision. Recently, a wider range of companies (those that want to attain greatness) has come to believe in the importance of this elusive, yet vitally important, component of corporate success. (p. 30)

One factor driving this need to create a corporate vision is that so many organizations have decentralized their decision making process. The decisions have pushed out of corporate headquarters into divisions—out of divisions and into departments. While the flattening of organizations appears to have stimulated innovation, accelerated decision making, and increased the sense of responsibility for providing total quality at all levels, it does create interesting problems: How can a company decentralize and at the same time have coherent and coordinated efforts? How can people in the far reaches of these flat organizations know where it is heading? (Collins & Porras, 1991).

“Across all the empirical research linking emotional intelligence competencies and visionary leadership to date, the most robust finding is that effective visionary leaders have the ability to powerfully communicate a compelling vision that inspires followers” (Groves, 2006, p. 567). While brand starts with the visionary leader, it has be owned by everyone in the organization, from the people making the products, to the ones packaging, to those tracking the shipments, to the ones who oversee the customer calls and the websites.

Kotter and Cohen (2002) argue that the central challenge of all organizations is communication—not strategy, not systems, not culture. Such elements are critical, but the core problem, without a doubt, is communication that positively affects behavior changing what people do. Effective communication requires an understanding of strategy, the implementation of systems and the foundation of a strong corporate culture. Larkin and Larkin (1994) echo a similar sentiment that leadership should have one goal—it should improve performance; it should change the way employees do their job.

Unfortunately, breaking through the noise and confusion is a difficult matter. Ries and Trout (1981) write:

> The average mind is already a dripping sponge that can only soak up more information at the expense of what's already there. Yet we continue to pour more information into that supersaturated sponge and are disappointed when our messages fail to get through. (p. 7)

The way to make an impact, Kotter and Cohen (2002) write, is to communicate with emotion. "People change what they do less because they are given analysis that sifts their thinking than because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings" (p. 1). Changing behavior is less a matter of giving people analysis to influence their thoughts than helping them to see a truth to influence their feelings.

The ability to influence feelings has a self-perpetuating advantage. Ambler and Barrow (1996) cite a respondent in a survey dedicated to the retailing industry: "if we have the best shops, with the best people, then we have the best word of mouth and receive the best applications and then we will have the best shops" (p. 186). While the comment refers to managing a retail location, the benefits of such a virtuous cycle can clearly benefit any organization.

All communication should be based on a core principle: a problem that the company is trying solve. It is what makes them unique; it is the difference that people care about—and care enough to pay for it. That is the brand. Once you solve the foundational brand issue, one can move on to branding. Adamson (2006) advises, "That 'ing' is huge. It is the creation of signals that convey what your brand stands for and establishes its difference in people's minds. A brand is the idea. Branding is the transmission of the idea" (p. 18).

**Brand as corporate identity.** The concept of contemporary branding can be traced back to a marketing department's attempts to create differentiation and preference for a particular product; the same principles have been extended to the organizational level in an internal attempt at corporate branding, as it is strategic and includes all stakeholders (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). Scholars have spent considerable effort on clarifying how constructs such as culture, reputation, image, and corporate identity are conceptually related, (L. Christensen & Askegaard, 2001; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Yet the notion of branding has only recently entered the discussion in the organizational studies literature, despite its obvious affinity with such concepts (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008) Albert and Whetten (1985) define organizational identity as "the set of beliefs shared by top managers and stakeholders about the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of an organization" (as cited in Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 15).

While brand and corporate identity are distinct and separate terms, they share a natural overlap. Much like branding, corporate identity can be "specified as the central and enduring attributes of an organization that distinguish it from other organizations" (Whetten, 2006, p. 220). The principal question being asked, in both cases, is "Who are we as an organization?"

## Tension of Intuition in Brand Leadership

Perhaps the tension between personal intuition and leadership begins well before the showdown in the boardroom. Western civilization, in particular, holds a perception that managers are required to provide clear direction with their insight and experience. Unfortunately, the result of such clear direction is often negative and the casualty is the proposed idea (Peters &Waterman, 1982). “Often top management, who believes its job is to sit in judgment, will inevitably veto a new idea. It is always ‘impractical’” (Edersheim, 2007, p. 109). Creative thought—the precursor to invention—requires an act of faith (Gilder, 1983).

Peters and Waterman (1982) have conducted significant research on the phenomenon of negative leadership. They wrote:

> Today’s version of rationality does not value experimentation and abhors mistakes. The conservatism that leads to inaction and year-long “study groups” frequently confronts businessmen with precisely what they were trying to avoid—having to make, eventually, one big bet. Giant product development groups analyze and analyze until years have gone by and they’ve designed themselves into one home-run product, with every bell and whistle attractive to every segment. (p. 47)

Perhaps the innate suspicion of trusting our intuition is largely based on our culture—the assumption that systemic and careful analysis yields superior choices has influenced the most basic assumptions of leadership theory.

> We live in a world that assumes that the quality of a decision is directly related to the time and effort that went into making it. When doctors are faced with a difficult diagnosis, they order more tests, and when we are uncertain about what we hear, we ask for a second opinion. And what do we tell our children? Haste makes waste. Look before you leap. Stop and *think*. Don’t judge a book by its cover. We believe that we are always better off gathering as much information as possible and spending as much time as possible in deliberation. We really only trust conscious decision-making. (Gladwell, 2007, p. 14)

Some researchers believe that intuitive processes come dangerously close to the realm of irrational or paranormal. As a result, they believe that intuitive processes are beyond the scope of scientific study. Consistent with the dominant paradigm of research in many institutions, the quantitative research method driven from a positivist’s perspective, has long been considered the only valid form of scholarly knowledge construction. Such a perspective holds that knowledge is systematically built by a rigorous adherence to certain rules. It begins with a hypothesis drawn from an existing theory base and explores relationships between pre-specified independent and dependent variables. There is an attempt to control extraneous variations by isolating the variable of interest while holding constant all predetermined variables under one study; unaccounted phenomena are unwanted variables to be considered and eliminated. These sample procedures are intended to represent a broader population; allowing for statistical analysis of results. The assumption is that these observed relationships among variables are generalizable to other contexts (McMillan & Wergin, 2010).

Such a deliberate approach often holds the scientific method to be the most rational approach and uses frequencies, percentages, averages, or statistics to prove or disprove pre-specified hypothesis. For such a purist, the intentions of conducting quantitative research are that specific laws or rules can be discovered and with positive assurance, attempt to project, or generalize, the truth of their findings to similar areas of interest.

Such rigorous research methodology was generally viewed as being separate from philosophy or theory: focusing primarily on techniques and procedures of interviewing, focus groups, observation, or statistical analysis (Kezar, 2004). The involvement, influence, and position of the "passive" researcher were of minimal concern; the experiment was still valid if the data focused on the methodology and results. The center of the experiment was the subject in question, and the privileged researcher was not much more than a facilitator of objective truth and knowledge. With researchers busying themselves with the practical issues of variables, statistics, experiments and measurements of conventional research, they often ignored the fact that "assumptions have been made and values smuggled into the decisions without the decision maker being aware of the process" (Easton, 2000, p. 206). Scholars have emphasized rational decision making over intuitive decision-making (Khatri & Ng, 2000). Recently, a number of researchers have challenged this positivist approach by asserting that systematic and analytical research results in decisions with severe limitations (Mintzberg, 1994).

Positivism, historically the dominant form of academic inquiry, has recently been heavily besieged by a perplexing undercurrent, a strong question about what knowledge is, what makes it valid, and whether it can be truly objective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). The basis of such a criticism is *constructivism*, or the philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of truth in the interdependent world in which we live.

> There is no truth out there, but rather multiple realities, depending on both the setting and on one's individual perspective. The world cannot be understood by analyzing its components, but rather as a whole, with all of its messy interactions. (McMillan & Wergin, 2010, p. 134)

Living and working in a culture that demands quantifiable and most often short-term results can have paralyzing effects; the culmination of research facts and data should by no means be confused as a viable substitute for strategic decision making. While there is no denying that information driven by research improves the quality of our decisions, it does not replace intuition as the advertising legend David Ogilvy so eloquently laments, "research is often misused by agencies and their clients. They have a way of using it to prove that they are right. They use research as a drunkard used a lamp-post—not for illumination but for support" (as cited in Barabba, 2004, p. 211).

Research by Isenberg (1986) and Burke and Miller (1999) has provided empirical evidence that in many situations leaders tend to use intuition in conjunction with rational analysis. While most researchers do not disagree, there appears to be an alarming imbalance in the literature with intuition being the forgotten stepchild. Most of the peer-reviewed articles seemed to present the decision making process as a highly evolved analytical process that is clearly afforded a considerable amount of time.

Carl Jung (1919) has observed that intuition does not denote something contrary to reason but is an extension of reason. It is neither a magical sixth sense nor a paranormal process. Nor is it a random process of guessing. It is a sophisticated form of reasoning based on chunking that an expert hones over years of job-specific experience (Prietula & Simon, 1989). It does not come easily; it requires years of experience and is founded upon a solid and complete grasp of the details of the business (Isenberg, 1986; Seebo, 1993). "Intuition is a holistic perception of reality that transcends rational ways of knowing" (Khatri & Ng, 2000, p. 60).

> Gordon Gould, the primary inventor of the laser, had this to say about his own epiphany: In the middle of one Saturday night . . . the whole thing . . . suddenly popped into my head and I saw how to build the laser . . . but that flash of insight required the 20 years of work I had done in physics and optics to put all of the bricks of that invention in there. (Berkun, 2007, p. 9)

**Intuition as a leadership characteristic is culturally misunderstood.** There is a tension when leadership and intuition intersect. In his autobiography, Lee Iacocca describes intuition as a feel for the problem and the ability to make decisions while others are still looking for facts (Iacocca, 2008). Miller and Ireland (2005) concur: "intuitive decision makers cannot explain why they feel the way they do or why they make the choices they make [and in fact] most executives could not articulate how they made decisions that defied logical analysis" (p. 20). The core of intuition is a set of insights and understandings that is not fully known to its owner.

Unfortunately, it often takes a bit of time for the feel to develop, during which the danger is losing the confidence of the followers. "Often top management, who believes its job is to sit in judgment, will inevitably veto a new idea. It is always 'impractical'" (Edersheim, 2007, p. 109). Accepting the innovation requires an act of faith (Gilder, 1983) yet among many followers there is an innate expectation that leaders are able to find their way, heroically, through any given situation. Political candidates often find that there is very little tolerance for a leader to re-adjust their position or to be perceived as a "flip-flopper" on any given issue.

**Intuition is largely independent.** Intuition is often associated with individualism bordering on nonconformity or antisocial behavior having an impact on established ways of thinking. The universally accepted discoveries of Galileo, Newton, and Darwin, for example, initially encountered more staunch resistance than enthusiastic support.

Many innovative people have described intuition as a highly internal process. Consider the following comments from the legendary advertising expert, David Ogilvy:

> The creative process requires more than reason. Most original thinking isn't even verbal. It requires "a groping experimentation with ideas, governed by intuitive hunches and inspired by the unconscious." The majority of businessmen are incapable of original thinking, because they are unable to escape from the tyranny of reason. Their imaginations are blocked.
>
> I am almost incapable of logical thought, but I have developed techniques for keeping open the telephone line to my unconscious, in case that disorderly repository has anything to tell me. I hear a great deal of music. I am on friendly terms with John Barleycorn. I take long hot baths. I go for long walks in the country. And I take frequent vacations, so that my brain can lie fallow—no golf, no cocktail parties, no tennis, no bridge, no concentration; only a bicycle.
>
> While thus employed in doing nothing, I receive a constant stream of telegrams from my unconscious, and these become the raw material for my advertisements. But more is required: hard work, an open mind, and ungovernable curiosity. (Ogilvy, 1963, p. 21)

**Left-brain communication overrides right brain verbalization.** Perhaps the conflict of intuition versus analytical thought process begins in the neurology of the creative leader. Understanding the struggle of neurological idiosyncrasies might offer a valuable perspective.

On the left side is the mode of comprehension we are typically conscious of: more prominent in awareness, thoughtful, able to ponder and reflect—it is largely responsible for our ability to speak. The counterpart to the left side is another system of knowing: emotionally compelling, impulsive, with the ability to solve complex issues and find hidden meaning.

The dichotomy of these two minds, the emotional and the rational, are designed to operate in tight harmony, guiding us through the intricate process of living. A long tradition of scholars have suggested that highly creative thoughts, and in particular insights, are distinct from language processes (Metcalfe & Wiebe, 1987; Schooler, Ohlsson, & Brooks, 1993). William James (1890) noted that many important insights are reported to have occurred in the absence of words: "Great thinkers have vast premonitory glimpses of schemes of relationship between terms, which hardly even as verbal images enter the mind, so rapid is the whole process" (p. 255).

Complex problem solving requires both the search for and manipulation of relevant information. As Ericsson and Simon (1998) noted, people cannot verbalize the memory retrieval process itself but only the end result of a particular memory search.

Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) continued the debate, with their concept of *verbal overshadowing*. If verbalization causes participants to neglect those processes that are not readily verbalized, then verbalization during problem solving may cause subjects to favor working memory manipulation over long-term memory retrieval. If insight problem solving requires the retrieval of less-than-obvious memory elements, then a reduced emphasis on long-term memory retrieval processes is likely to lower the probability of attaining insight. The demand to verbalize, in effect, shuts down the ability to conduct complex problem solving.

One can only imagine the conundrum of a creative leader as they wrestle with complex problems while, at the same time, trying to articulate the thoughts they are still trying to develop.

**The dark side of intuitive leadership.** The date was April 23, 1985, and despite all their industry expertise, market research, and distinguished leadership, Coca-Cola was doing all it could to publicize the launch of, arguably, what would become the largest and most visual marketing debacle in history (Sellers & De Llosa, 1995). What makes Coca-Cola's legendary failure so interesting is that the product was actually a proven enhancement of the flavor. The reason it failed was a branding issue. “Coca-Cola had forgotten what its core brand was meant to stand for. It naively thought that taste was the only factor customers cared about. It was wrong.” (Haig, 2005, p. 8).

While the history of Coca-Cola is that the company began producing its famously secret recipe in 1885, it was really in the 1920s when the beverage began to be synonymous with American culture. Popular movies such as *Imitation of Life* (Laemmle & Stahl, 1934) gave Coke much free publicity, perpetuating the soft drink being as American as apple pie and baseball. In World War II, Coke went along to war with the GIs under the patriotic charge of company president Woodruff to “see that every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents, wherever he is and whatever it costs the company” (as cited in Fournier, 2001, p. 3).

General Eisenhower requested that the War Department establish ten bottling plants in North Africa and Italy to support the war-related distribution operations (P. Mooney, 2008). By the end of the war, GIs would consume an astonishing 5 billion bottles of Coke. There would exist 64 bottling plants worldwide, each built at the U.S. government’s expense that Coca Cola would later assume without cost. The result was a global presence and international logistics chain that would have taken Coca-Cola decades and millions of dollars to replicate.

Coca Cola continued to thrive well into the 1960s, enjoying a solid 60% market share and outperforming its nearest rival, Pepsi by two to one. Unfortunately, by the end of the 1970s internal struggles began to take its toll on the leadership and organization. Fighting apathetic franchisors, hyperinflation, myopic leaders, and the government’s allegations of monopolizing the soft drink industry, Coca-Cola’s annual growth slowed from an impressive 15% to roughly 2%.

While the soft drink giant fought its own demons, Pepsi-Co quietly began to build steam, capturing the spirit of the new "Pepsi Generation" through its projection of youth, vitality, and idealism. By the 1980s, the fabled "Cola Wars" were well under way and Pepsi had recently introduced its "Pepsi Challenge" advertising campaign across the entire U.S. Thousands of focus group participants sipped two unidentified samples of cola; one Coca-Cola, the other Pepsi. Young people unanimously displayed a preference for the sweeter taste of Pepsi. After six months of the aggressive marketing campaign—including price discounts, coupon campaigns, numerous celebrity endorsements—the results were released in their "Choice of a New Generation" campaign and by 1983, Coca-Cola's market share had declined to an alarming 24%.

For CEO Roberto Goizueta, losing market share to Pepsi was simply not an option. In fact, his mission in life was to put an end to the Cola War. When he took over the leadership in August 1989, his famous battle cry was "let me assure you at the outset that such things as the reformulation of any or all of our products will not stand in the way of giving any of our competitors a real or perceived product advantage" (as cited in Fournier, 2001, p. 10). As a result, Coca-Cola's leadership was scrambling to stop Pepsi's momentum. It was clear that they would need to do something big and would need to do it fast.

With the secrecy of high-level military operatives, Coca-Cola began to conduct their own research. They concluded that Pepsi was by far the popular favorite and, understandably, decided to revamp their 99-year-old famous formula. "When you look at the Pepsi Challenge," notes Roy Stout, director of customer research at Coca-Cola Company, "you *have* to begin asking about taste" (as cited in Oliver, 1987, p. 118).

In 1982, Coca-Cola's Marketing Research Department conducted an initial round of research with 200 interviews in 10 major metro markets to investigate customer's willingness to accept a different Coke formulation. Participants were shown storyboards and mock advertisements and asked to share their reactions. Test versus control experimental designs were used to eliminate any biases toward name brands. One board said that Coke had added a new ingredient and that it tasted smoother, while another said the same about Pepsi. "Would you try the new product?" they were asked. "Would you switch brands immediately?" "Would you be upset?" Researchers estimated from the survey responses that 10 to12% of Coke drinkers would be upset by the change and that one half of those would get over the change while the other half would not. Surprisingly, exclusive Pepsi drinkers expressed an interest in the new Coke as well, making the findings all the more encouraging (Fournier, 2001).

CEO Goizueta called the New Coke "the surest move the company has ever made" (as cited in Oliver, 1987, p. 5)—and there were no naysayers to dare say otherwise. And why should there be any? The decision came straight from a highly charismatic leader with history of successfully leading change. Given all the research that was performed, the solution seemed rather obvious: if Pepsi was able to win market share simply by promoting the preferential taste of their product, couldn't they do the same thing and beat the competition at its own game? At least they were doing something about the embarrassing beating they had been taking over the last decade.

In a grueling press conference, a reporter inquired if the company was going to consider reformulating the recipe for Diet Coke "assuming that this is a success." Goizueta curtly replied, "No. And I don't assume that this is a success. This *is* a success" (as cited in Pendergrast, 2000, p. 352).

Unfortunately, the reaction of the American people was just as negative as the leadership was positive. An astonishing 40,000 letters were delivered to Coca-Cola's headquarters stating their rage that Coke would have the gall to perform such an audacious and insensitive act (Oliver, 1987). One letter said, “I don’t think I would be more upset if you were to burn the flag in the front yard” (as cited in Mowen, 1988, p. 16). On May 12, 1985 a Coke customer wrote “To the Master Dodo to whom this concerns: What ignoramus decided to change the formula of Coke?!?! The new formula is gross, disgusting, unexciting, and *WORSE THAN PEPSI!!*” (as cited in Pendergrast, 2000, p. 347). Houston Astrodome crowds vehemently booed New Coke commercials on the stadium’s giant video screen. People were hoarding cases of the old formula and allegedly reselling them for $30 a case.

As Roberto Goizueta noted with annoyance, it was chic to dump on New Coke. “We could have introduced the elixir of the gods,” one embattled executive lamented, “and it wouldn’t have made any difference” (as cited in Pendergrast, 2000, p .355). Within days, production of New Coke came to a halt and in a mere three months a publicly scorned Coca-Cola ordered the recall of all cans containing the new formula.

In their haste to address the Pepsi Challenge, Coca-Cola’s executives failed to consider their customer’s emotional tie. Their decision, driven by fear and justified by quantitative research, “did not understand the deep emotions of so many of our customers for Coca-Cola,” exclaimed humbled company president, Donald Keough (as cited in Pendergrast, 2000, p. 375).

The outspoken advertising legend, David Ogilvy would probably say of Coca Cola, his famous quote, that the company used “research as a drunkard uses a lamppost—not for illumination but for support” (as cited in Barabba, 2004, p. 211). Prietula and Simon (1989) would mostly likely agree, and say that the only thing missing from all the research was a “sophisticated form of reasoning based on a solid and complete grasp of the details of the business” (p. 322) or as Khatri and Ng (2000) phrase it, “a holistic perception of reality that transcends rational ways of knowing” (p. 374).

**Brand as the Framework for Making Effective Decisions That Require Intuition**

While intuition has fascinated psychological theory, extensive research has examined the phenomena among experts in the arena of decision-making and organizational change. According to Simon and Barnard (1976), when we use our intuition to formulate our judgments, we are drawing on rules and patterns we cannot easily articulate. It is "reaching conclusions on the basis of things that go on in our perceptional system, where we are aware of the result of the perception, but not aware of the steps" (Patton, 2003, p. 990). As a product of complexity and uncertainty within continuous change means that leaders have to find answers outside of rational decision-making.

Intuition in the decision-making process can be seen as a continuum. At one extreme there is an instantaneous, purely emotional and impulsive reaction to a situation. At the other end, there is a level of intuition that complements analytical reasoning based on one's experience and learning. In between, there exists an infinite degree of possible combinations (Burke & Miller, 1999). In seeking to establish the optimal mixture of intuition and rational analysis, Bennett (1998) states that it is vital that managers trust their intuition and are able to make predictions when their formal analysis models are unable to keep up with the unseen changes in the business environment. Such trust, he postulates, is obtained when individuals have been exposed to areas that will give them valuable experience and also have the ability to capitalize on this tacit knowledge base.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) studied the thought process of nearly 100 creative people, from artists to scientists. Instead of doing clinical research with probes and brain scans, he focused on each innovator's insights. He wanted to understand their perceptions of innovation, unfiltered by the often stifling and self-defeating rigors of hard science. He found that there is a period of incubation in which the knowledge is digested, perhaps experiments are conducted and solutions are suggested. During this stage, a considerable amount of time needs to be spent fully engaged and immersed, exploring the domain and all related ideas. There may be long pauses during this incubation stage when progress stalls and confidence wanes, an experience the Greeks would have called “losing the muse” (Berkun, 2007, p. 11). The deep insights, if they happen, occur in the depths of this incubation phase; often during this time spent doing unrelated activities.

Nobel laureate Herbert Simon was heavily influenced by De Groot’s (1965) seminal research on pattern recognition of different levels of chess players.

> Masters search through about the same number of possibilities as weaker ones—perhaps even fewer, almost certainly not more—but they are very good at coming up with the “right” moves for further consideration, whereas weaker players spend *considerable time analyzing the consequences of bad moves* [emphasis added]. (Chase & Simon, 1973, p. 55)

The difference, they conclude, is largely the time spent developing the expertise. The ability to store and retrieve meaningful information ,(also known as *chunking*) is largely a function of time spent developing the expertise. Chess masters, who are largely indicative of experts in other fields, begin to harness this power of chunking after approximately 10 years of practice or exposure to 50,000 chess position patterns.

Few researchers will dispute these findings. Malcolm Gladwell (2007) wrote *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking,* theorizing that the difference between good and bad decision-making is directly related to the details people focus on. Similarly, psychologist Karl Weick (1995) has written extensively on intuition as being “compressed expertise” (p. 88) as a simplified technique for people to make sense of their world.

**Simplicity.** In order to make an impact, it is essential to identify and articulate the essential central concept. Successful lawyers know that it is dangerous to argue ten points, even if each is a good point. When the jurors get back to the jury room they won’t remember any. “To strip an idea down to its core, we must be masters of exclusion. We must relentlessly prioritize" (C. Heath & Heath, 2007a, p. 16.). The process they encourage, is the unfolding of a real-life mystery.

Collins (2001) proposes that the unfolding of this real-life mystery is in what he defines as a clearly defined strategy that "simplifies a complex world into a single organizing idea, a basic principle or concept that unifies and guides everything" (p. 91). Ries and Trout (1981) compare communication to modern architecture where less is more: "You have to sharpen your message to cut into the mind. You have to jettison the ambiguities, simplify the message, and then simplify it some more if you want to make a long-lasting impression" (p. 8). The process demands rigorous thinking, discipline, confidence, and focus to get to the core concept; it requires an ability to think in a less-than-obvious way.

While this process is admittedly exhausting, the end result is a strategy that is empirically proven to produce incredible results. Peter Georgescu, former CEO of Young and Rubicam, declared of the strongest brand message that "[such] ideas seem almost too obvious but, in the end, were proven to be genius in hindsight" (as cited in Adamson, 2006, p. 25). To determine a company's personal strategy Collins suggests answering the following three questions:

> 1) *What you can be the best in the world at?* (and, equally important, what you cannot be the best in the world at). This discerning standard goes far beyond core competence. Just because you possess a core competence doesn't necessarily mean you can be the best in the world at it. Conversely, what you can be the best at might not even be something in which you are currently engaged.
> 2) *What drives your economic engine?* All the good-to-great companies attained piercing insight into how to generate sustained and robust cash flow and profitability. In particular, they discover the single denominator – profit per x - that had the greatest impact on their economics (It would be cash flow per x in the social sector)
> 3) *What you are deeply passionate about?* The good-to-great companies focused on those activities that ignited their passion. The idea here is not to stimulate passion but to discover what makes you passionate. (Collins, 2001, p. 96)

While Collins rarely uses the term ‘brand’ to express his hedgehog concept, the discipline he advocates is similar to the process Adamson (2006) suggests: a powerful idea, he admonishes, lies in the relentless pursuit of simplicity:

> It’s hard to create anything simple when you’re working with a committee or groups of different players. It takes discipline. It takes making choices. It takes saying no. People working with you on the brand position must agree not to push everything back to the lowest, safest common denominator. You have to agree not to let research drive you into endless rounds of analysis, which leads to “analysis paralysis.” (pp. 73–74)

An idea must be a simple one if there’s any chance of achieving organizational understanding, acceptance and implementation. Blackwell and Stephan (2004) concur: “Simplicity doesn’t mean absence of strategy, nor does it mean anything less than precise execution” (p. 90).

**Brand Leadership Situated in Contemporary Leadership Theories**

In the globalized, hyper-connected age in which we live, one question persists in boardrooms, corner offices, business schools, and conferences all over the world: “What is leadership and how has it changed in the 21st century?” (Taylor, 2013, para. 1). Leadership has sparked an understandable appetite that shows no sign of weakening; bookstores, e-books, seminars, motivational speakers and personal coaches have built a considerable industry supporting this fascination. And yet, “despite all this attention, there is little evidence that we are getting better at it” (A. Sinclair, 2007, p. xiii).

In 1978, Burns introduced a revolutionary new paradigm which he called *transforming leadership.* “If we know all too much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership” (Burns, 1978, p. 1). His implication was that leadership is different than leading; this is evident in his definition of leadership:

> Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and

> conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers. (p. 425)

The two parts to this definition are his admonition that the nature of the goals is critical and that the process is reciprocal and happens within a context of competition and conflict.

Barker (1997) asks what have we done with Burns' proposition since 1978. He suggests that most of his work has been reduced it to slogans: "Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing" (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 21).

We have equated it with economic success and manipulating people: "leadership is measured by success and effectiveness. A leader is successful when the person he or she is trying to influence demonstrated the desired behavior" (Forbes, 1991, p. 70).

We have confused it with management: "successful leaders and managers must use power—to influence others, to monitor results and to sanction performance" (Winter, 1991, p. 77).

We have associated it with authority: "leadership has traditionally been synonymous with authority, and authority has traditionally been understood as the ability to command others, control subordinates, and make all the truly important decisions yourself (Katzenbach & Smith, 1992, p. 129). And, we have become mired in an obsession with the rich and powerful, with traits, characteristics, behaviors, roles, style and abilities how by hook or crook have obtained high positions, and we know little if anything more about leadership: "students of leadership will be interested in shedding light on the dominant background characteristics of the elite, the homogeneity, and behavioral patters" (Bassiry & Dekmejian, 1993, p. 47).

A. Sinclair and Lips-Wiersma (2008) echo the same frustration with the fascination of leadership.

> This traditional view of leadership rests on the flawed assumption that it is the job of leaders to change the behaviours, actions and beliefs of others. The assumption should be

> challenged as neither feasible nor morally defensible. To use one's role as a leader primarily to transform others is often to treat people as instruments—as a means to someone else's ends. (p. xvii)

As a result, the consequences of bad leadership are all around us. In the late 1990s, Enron was regarded as the model company of the future and their leaders, Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling were hailed as economic prophets. Shortly before their fall from grace, the two partners in crime were glorified in *Fortune* magazine as being "one of the deepest and most innovative management teams in the world" (A. Sinclair & Lips-Wiersma, 2008, p. 3)—and then went to being internationally humiliated as enduring tombstones of fraud, deception, and disgrace

Perhaps it is appropriate to slow down, to take a moment of self-reflection, and to question if most of our leadership ideals in Western Society are not incredibly flawed. Perhaps it is not so appropriate to expect individual performances of heroic action, certainty, and decisiveness when navigating the unchartered waters of unprecedented pressures of globalization. Perhaps people have become disillusioned with leaders who are able to change in others, yet they remain unchanged.

Janis (1972) warns of *groupthink* that can create illusions of invincibility and undermine good decision-making. Research on groupthink has widely documented the phenomenon where excessive concurrence-seeking behaviors, in the name of loyalty and not breaking rank, induce teams to make catastrophically bad decisions.

If a strategy flows from a deep understanding of an organization's founding principles, the vision will not be without a rational, sustained, and appropriate direction. Denhardt warns "the vision should not serve as emotional repositories for the collective fantasies of followers" (as cited in A. Sinclair, 2007, p. 67). Problems occur when a leader is too attached to his or her vision or reputation and shows inadequate flexibility, humility, and respect for followers. "The only visions that really work are those that resonate deeply with a group, organization, or society, and are available to be taken up and shaped by that community" (A. Sinclair & Lips-Wiersma, 2008, p. xviii).

To underline the obvious, Adolf Hitler is an extraordinary display of classic dysfunctional visionary leadership. Unfortunately, while the estimated World War II death toll of 72 million arguably defines him as the most influential individual of the 20th century, his highly effective, yet unfortunate, leadership traits soberly remind us that leadership has the potential to come off track very, very quickly (Ciulla, 2014).

> Under these circumstances, such leaders start to believe themselves to be so great that they are outside the constraints applicable to 'ordinary' people. This leader starts to believe that his 'visions' unquestionably deserving, and therefore can legitimately come to serve for others as well as himself. A range of narcissistic, ego-inflated, sometime neurotic and psychopathic behaviours can develop. (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992, p. 117)

By most accounts, such a statement describes the management style of Steve Jobs, the former CEO of the Apple Corporation. Associates talk about his propensity to create reality distortion fields in which he would convince himself, and others, of doing the impossible. Andy Hertzfeld described the phenomenon: "The reality distortion field was a confounding mélange of a charismatic rhetorical style, indomitable will, and eagerness to bend any fact to fit the purpose at hand." (Isaacson, 2011, p. 118). Such a distorted sense of reality had a disturbing effect on the way Jobs handled his team of brutalized employees. He frequently demoralized his employees, categorizing them into starkly distinct groups: "assholes" or "enlightened."

Bill Atkinson, the Mac designer who fell on the good side of Jobs' dichotomy, described what it was like:

> It was difficult working under Steve, because there was a great polarity between gods and shitheads. If you were a god, you were up on a pedestal and could do no wrong. Those of us who were considered gods, as I was, knew that we were actually mortal and made bad engineering decisions and farted like any person, so we were always afraid that we would get knocked off our pedestal. The ones who were shitheads, who were brilliant engineers working very hard, felt there was no way they could get appreciated and rise above their status (Isaacson, 2011, p. 121)

It is chilling to think of the possible consequences if Jobs' passion and influence were in another industry, such as governing, where he would have had an even larger sphere of social influence.

Fortunately, there are just as many great, real-life examples of what it means to lead innovation in light of contemporary leadership theories. "Alan Kay, a member of the legendary group at Xerox PARC . . . said about his manager, Bob Taylor: 'His attitude kept it safe for others to put aside fears and ego and concentrate objectively on the problem at hand'" (Berkun, 2007, p. 104). Taylor enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for encouraging a free discourse of ideas, including open criticism and debate, in a weekly meeting in a room filled with beanbag chairs. The goal was not to roast each other, but to push, prod, cajole, share, inspire, and enrage as needed to give life to everyone's best ideas (Berkun, 2007).

On creatingˆand knowing that you have created —a positive, innovative work environment, according to cell biologist and best selling author, Lewis Thomas,

> one way to tell when something important is going on is by laughter. It seems to me that whenever I have been around a laboratory at a time when something very interesting has happened, it has at first seemed to be quite funny. There's laughter connected with the surprise. And whenever you hear laughter, and someone saying, 'But that's *preposterous!'* . . . you can tell that things are going well. (Druckman, Bjork, & National Research Council, 991, p. 231)

**Leading with self-awareness.** An environment of open communication is critical when leading with intuition. As in the case of New Coke, it is clear that something had gone astray amidst the myriad of conclusions drawn from what appeared to be the most concrete, hard facts. Such data is irrelevant unless interpreted meaningfully—and the interpretation of data is often subjective. The more significant the decision, the more important it is to step back and reassess the initial assumptions. Such self-reflection requires a deep understanding of the situation or context to which it pertains; and thus, necessitates the use of both judgment and intuition (Khatri & Ng, 2000).

In one of the largest in-depth studies on leadership development ever conducted, George, et al. (2005) analyzed over 125 leaders and 3,000 pages of transcripts to discover that leadership emerges from a clear understanding of one's life stories. In many cases, this understanding was a result of a difficult experience that not only gave them a solid core of empathy but also sparked a sincere desire to lead. Consciously and subconsciously, they were able to identify and consistently reflect to who they were at their very core. This awareness makes them confident, transparent, and approachable. "Authentic leaders also keep a strong support team around them, ensuring that they live integrated, grounded lives" (George et al., 2005). Self-awareness helps leaders be grounded as individuals. They are not omnipotent, "lone rangers." They count on the sacrifice and contributions of others. An absence of this critical personality trait often proves detrimental to individuals as well as corporations.

> Leaders who get disconnected from their early identity, and are intent on crafting a grander one for themselves, often become more vulnerable to corruption. They start believing the myth that they have created about themselves- they are smarter than the average person and can therefore put themselves above the rules and norms by which others live. Leaders, in these cases, develop identities that are built on deception. They get locked into performances that are inflated and purport to have 'the answers'. These performances are seductive and convincing for the leaders themselves and for followers, who want to align themselves with the "chosen" ones. (A. Sinclair & Lips-Wiersma, 2008, p. 56)

Much research is examining the role of previous failure as a critical element to extraordinary leadership. History is peppered with the fascinating tales of heroes who have previously failed. Bernie Marcus, for example, got fired from Handy Dan, a do-it-yourself hardware retailer, before he went on to begin Home Depot. Prior to becoming the CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch was held responsible for a pilot plastics plant that blew up in 1966 (Sellers &

De Llosa, 1995). Steve Jobs was fired from Apple, the company he founded, and did not have a successful product for 18 years before he came back to achieve timeless stardom.

While the scholarship needs to have room to recognize intuition, there are considerable, and frightening, issues of prejudice, which need to be considered as well. Providing room for the highly subjective use of intuition often proves to be fertile grounds for marginalization. While such an alarming phenomenon is easily identified in others' actions, it is imperative to recognize that the tendency is much more visceral, and much more primal, than one would naturally acknowledge. In *Switch: How to Change When Change is Hard,* C. Heath and Heath (2007b) illustrate how easy it is to jump to conclusions about people and how easy it is to fall into the what they call the *fundamental attribution error trap*:

> When some guy cuts you off in traffic, you probably think, instinctively: *What a jerk!* (Or perhaps your inner voice is more vulgar.) What you almost certainly don't think to yourself is, "gosh, I wonder what's wrong that he is in such a hurry." (p. 178)

People are not always optimal social information processors. Social perception and judgment are "subject to numerous biases, which often impair people's ability to accurately predict the future, attribute causation, and otherwise understand the social world in which they act, judge, and choose" (Krieger, 2004, p. 843). The damage occurs when a highly visible failure is seen as a core competency issue for one person (a black female executive), and a wonderful learning opportunity for another (a White male executive). Harvard Business School professor John Kotter says:

> I can imagine a group of executives 20 years ago discussing a candidate for a top job and saying, "this guy had a big failure when he was 32." Everyone else would say, "Yep, yep, that's a bad sign." I can imagine that same group considering a candidate today and saying, "What worries me about this guy is that he's never failed." (as cited in Sellers & De Llosa, 1995, p. 49)

Notwithstanding such inspiring examples of horribly public-failure-then-amazing-success leaders, there is the reality of incurring catastrophic damage in some cases that are simply non-repairable. While accepting failure is stimulating fodder for academic discourse, I suspect that for every success story, there are multiple examples of complete and utter failure.

So how does one truly recognize the "false prophets"? In *Where Have All The Leaders Gone,* Lee Iacocca (2008) retells a conversation Senator Joe Biden had with President Bush a few months after the American troops marched into Baghdad:

> Joe Biden was sitting in the Oval Office outlining his concerns to the President—the explosive mix of Shiite and Sunni, the disbanded Iraqi army, the problems securing the oil field. "The President was serene," Joe recalled. "He told me he was sure that we were on the right course and that all could be well. "Mr. President," I finally said, "how can you be so sure when you don't know all the facts?" Bush then reached over and put a steadying hand on Joe's shoulder. "My instincts," he said. "My instincts." Joe was flabbergasted. He told Bush, "Mr. President, your instincts aren't good enough." (p. 7)

While leaders negotiating highly complex situations need to maintain a sense of confidence, they need to have a reverence for the scope of their decisions, an unwavering commitment to self-awareness, and most importantly, an extraordinary support team whom they can trust. Without those checks-and-balances, it would be easy to get side tracked (George et al., 2007).

**Corporation as a collection of individuals to realize their full potential.** It is clear that the case for intuition needs to be applied to individuals as well as organizations. In *The Fifth Discipline,* Senge (1990) writes how critical it is that organizations deliberately cultivate an environment of team learning, or collective expertise. The vision of such an organization is "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3). People who function together in such an extraordinary way naturally trust one another. They complement each other's strengths and compensate each other's limitations. Their common goal is much larger than their individual goals.

The good news is that such an environment is possible; the bad news is that developing such an environment is incredibly time-consuming (Prietula & Simon, 1989). With the loss of organizational memory (through delaying and cutback in jobs), information overload, and the epidemic of corporate time famine, this compressed expertise is often on an organization's endangered species list. There is a need for organizations to try harder to develop their own emotional intelligence (Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999) and cognitive competences (Sparrow, 2000) and it requires years of experience to achieve intuition.

Senge (1990) expresses the frustration of a limited learning horizon, or a breadth of vision in time and space in which we assess the effectiveness of our decisions. Unfortunately, the most critical decisions have systemic consequences that stretch over decades. "Forget your tired old ideas about leadership. The most successful corporation will be something called a learning organization" (p. 23). "The ability to learn faster than your competitors," said Arie De Geus (1988), head of planning for Royal Dutch/Shell," may be the only sustainable competitive advantage" (p. 18). In order to realize a learning organization, Senge (1990) asserts that the following five disciplines are required (paraphrased here from pp. 5–10):

*Personal Mastery*— Learning to expand our personal capacity to create the results we most desire, and creating an organizational environment that encourages all its members to develop themselves toward the goals and purposes they choose.

*Mental Models*—Reflecting upon, continually clarifying, and improving our internal pictures of the world and seeing how they shape our actions and decisions.

*Shared Vision*—Building a sense of commitment in a group, by developing shared images of the future we seek to create and the principles and guiding practices by which we hope to get there.

*Team Learning*—Transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual member's talents.

*Systems Thinking*—A way of thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behavior of systems. This discipline helps us see how to change systems more effectively and to act more in tune with the larger process of the natural and economic world.

Senge (1990) stresses that these five disciplines must work together as a system and that they are not stand-alone concepts. It is the fifth discipline, systems thinking, that embodies the entire theory behind a learning organization, thereby enabling an organization the ability to contemplate the whole, not individual parts, in producing changes more effectively. Learning organizations are able to master systems thinking in a global world; a concept which requires a new way of thinking. It takes time, patience, a change in bias, and most importantly, a willingness to see the world as a complex system.

**Leadership as nurturing collective intuition.** Heifetz (1994) argues that most followers are desperate for leaders to tell them what to do. Particularly in situations of what he calls *adaptive leadership*, where groups need to work out new ways to do organizational work rather than just apply the usual rules, leaders need to find ways of reducing this dependency. Acts of leadership, he postulates, involve helping focus the group on overriding purposes and values, rather than telling them what the solution is.

Such a paradigm shift in leadership places a heavy emphasis on the ability of the leader to infuse such a proactive learning culture into the DNA of the organization. If an organization is to wait until change is required, then it exponentially increases the risk of failure. Panic sets in and the hasty decision is implemented in limited time. The possibility of mistakes grows in direct proportion; the failures are cataclysmic and the confidence of the organization understandably begins to erode.

It is critical that a collaborative culture and a deliberate, rigorous process determine the appropriate strategy. Research shows that teams who employ such deliberate rigor in their problem solving exercises consistently yielded higher quality and more original solutions (Mumford, Supinski, Baughman, Costanza, & Threlfall, 1997).

## Brands and Critical Theory

Despite the benefits and advantages of creating a branding organization, a comprehensive literature review would be incomplete without a mention of emerging critical theories. From the limited scope of this dissertation, it would much easier to hope that all branding leaders are noble and strive to lead responsibly with the corporate interests aligned with the customer wants and needs.

Instead, there is a full-fledged social movement sustained by best-selling books such as Eric Schlosser's (2001) *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* and Naomi Klein's (2000) best-selling *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, raising grave concerns of environmental issues, human rights, cultural degradation, and an unfair market advantage ("Who's wearing", 2001).

**A destructive customer culture.** From the sociological perspective, there is a counterculture forming around the idea that the branding efforts of global customer goods companies have spawned a societally destructive customer culture. Provoked by the fear that branding is little more than the manipulation of a society's psychology, there is a claim that these "merchants of discontent" (Piety, 2001), are responsible for what has been called *affluenza* or the "all consuming epidemic" (De Graaf, Wann, & Naylor, 2005), fuelled by economic globalization and instant gratification

Determined to stay ahead of the competition with pricing and supply chain management, some brands such as Nike have been subjected to harsh criticism for their alleged use of contracting with factories accused of violating child labor, minimum wage, and overtime laws (Kenyon, 2000).

**Branding as a barrier to entry.** From a corporate perspective, critical theorists purport that these unethical manufacturing practices have created an unfair monopoly. Consistent with the claim by Ries and Ries (2000, 2002) that a brand needs to be first to market, Bain's (1954) seminal research on conditions to entry led him to conclude that "the advantage to established sellers accruing from buyer preferences for their products as opposed to potential entrant products is on average larger and more frequent in occurrence at large value than any other barrier to entry (p. 216). Interestingly, Bain did not explicitly describe any one reason for this barrier; but a number of his remarks point toward buyer uncertainty about the unknown product's value as the possible deterrent (Schmalensee, 1982).

## Relevant Themes

While there appears to be as many definitions of branding as there are theorists, there are vast contradictions or varying points of view. Whether the research is qualitative or quantitative there appears to be, in fact, a considerable amount of respect and appreciation among the branding academics.

While many new product launches are destined to fail (D. Aaker, 1996; Adamson, 2006; Haig, 2005; Ries & Ries, 2002, 2005) the brand, often, appears to be a significant factor. Scott Bedbury, Starbucks' former vice president of marketing controversially admitted, "customers don't truly believe that there's a huge difference between products" (as cited in Haig 2005, p. 3). Regardless of the industry—fashion, automotive, health care, and political—each organization needs to build a strong emotional brand with their shareholders if they have hope of survival.

There is deep dissatisfaction with the state of leadership training and development. While branding leadership may not prove to be the missing cornerstone, it may open the discourse to allow for a new paradigm; a distinct and viable leadership paradigm that acknowledges leadership to be a three part relationship; leader, follower, and context.

**Summary and Implications for Research.**

A review of branding leadership demonstrates how critical the topic is and just how much work remains to be done. The following sections briefly summarize key needs and themes arising from the review in this chapter.

**The need for rigorous brand exploration steeped in prescriptive, rather than descriptive, empirical research.** While the importance of creating a strong brand is clear, most contemporary branding books do not want to "dishearten their readers by giving them the truth: a brand—*any* brand—is always more likely to fail than succeed" (Haig, 2005, p. xiii). In fact, the research states that 9 out of every 10 product launches end in failure (Ries & Ries, 2000). And this failure is no respecter of person. As examples show, global giants such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's have proved just as likely to create branding failures as smaller and less mature companies with very limited marketing experience (Haig, 2005).

These harrowing statistics beg the need for rigorous, academic research. Not descriptive research that scrutinizes success or failure, but prescriptive research that suggests paradigm shifts to help increase the chances of a brand's survival. In the past, many managers attempted to succeed by imitating another company's strategy or organizational model; "today's leaders are forced to invent, not copy; there are no sure-fire strategies or models to copy" (Toffler, 1985, p. 2).

> There is a shortage of good advice on making tough business decisions. The approaches typically proposed by management gurus tend to advocate performing careful analyses rather than trusting intuition or deciding issues with a combination of rational analysis are insufficient. (Patton, 2003, p. 994)

In order to make good decisions when constrained by time and uncertainty, there is no substitute for good intuition, effectively developed from experience (Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003; Patton, 2003;).

**Leadership to incorporate context.** Leaders of all stripes, business, military, all resort to intuitive decision-making. In fact, "the same is true for individuals involved in occupations that involve crises (police officers, fire fighters, paramedics) since they too may gain many decision-making habits and enhanced ability to respond intuitively to sudden emergency situations" (Patton, 2003, p. 989). The leader of every organization needs to be aware of the context in which they are leading. A leader may not need to connect with all the shareholders on an emotional level, but they need to be acutely aware of the capacity and knowledge held by individuals within the organization.

**Leadership as a way of being.** In *Good to Great,* Jim Collins (2001) describes such leaders as having the ability to

> channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It's not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—*but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.*" (p. 21)

In this exhaustive study, Collins clearly draws a line in the sand for effective leadership that drives sustained growth. At one end of the leadership personality continuum, you may find overly charismatic leaders with gargantuan egos and lackluster balance sheets, and on the other side you have a paradoxical mix of personal humility, fierce professional pride, and a balance sheet showing spectacular returns.

Unlike more tradition-based leadership profiles that are heavily grounded on bravado and the flaunting of personal success, such leaders defy identification. While they are fiercely dedicated to the success of the organization, such dogmatic determination is usually camouflaged by humility. In fact, Collins (2001) says this compelling modesty "struck [him] by how the good-to-great leaders *didn't* talk about themselves." (p. 27) In fact, when interviewed, those that worked with or wrote about such leaders continually used the same descriptions "like *quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, understated, did not believe his own clippings*" (p. 27) and so on.

A. Sinclair & Lips-Wiersma (2008) see

> leadership . . . as a *form of being* (with ourselves and others): a way of thinking and acting that awakens and mobilizes people to find new, freer and more meaningful ways of seeing, working and living. This form of leadership is anchored to personal self-awareness and mindfulness to others. (p. xviii)

Clearly, while their professional perspective is relentlessly driving results, these leaders' approach is more like a world-view: a form of being that recognizes the collective success of their organization to be much greater than their own. Ironically, the strongest adaptive leaders are often marginalized in the selection process. In fact, it is interesting to note that those who make Fast Company's regular list of the most innovative leaders are mainly founders of their own organizations, people like  Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, and Richard Branson.

The weakness of the theory continues past the identification and selection process of such leaders. Because such leaders inherently value the success of the organization above their own, they are often bypassed for advancement. In practice, such a form of being could be easily viewed in Western society as not possessing strong leadership characteristics. In comparison to traditional examples of a classic militant leader, such exploratory and inquiring mannerisms could be potentially viewed as the antithesis of leadership, resulting in a reluctance of peers to follow.

As in the case of New Coke fiasco described above, the leadership had a deep and reputable expertise in the industry, the research was complete, successful emulators like Pepsi were evidently present, yet something was amiss—and terribly so. Consistent with many of the examples of personal failure, the company that launched the most embarrassing branding debacle in the history of the world has since fully recovered. In 2011, Interbrand, the branding authority that places a monetary figure to the power of a company's brand, valued the Coca-Cola brand at an astonishing $71million.

**Conclusion**

In *New Rules of Brand Leadership,* Jez Frampton (2013), CEO of Interbrand, begins with a question; "In our globalized, hyper connected age, one question persists in boardrooms, corner offices, business schools, and conferences all over the world: 'What is leadership and how has it changed in the 21st century?'" (para. 1). The study of Branding Leadership is a relatively unexplored academic frontier that may provide meaningful answers to the persisting leadership questions of the 21st century.

In 2000 D. Aaker and Joachimsthaler wrote the book, *Brand Leadership,* calling for a paradigm shift of the classic, tactically oriented brand management system pioneered by Proctor and Gamble. Recognizing that, in the past, brand management has been reactive and tactical, the authors assert that brands in the future should be much more proactive and strategic. Their seminal research, however, is focused on describing the architecture of a branded organization: the role of sponsorship, brand identity, brand building on the web, building brand advertising without traditional media, and organizing toward a global brand.

While the name implies similar research, there is a subtle, yet significant difference. First and foremost, this study recognizes that all branded organizations have one common denominator—a leader. It will focus on representing a viewpoint that is underserved in the literature—the viewpoint of a practicing, innovative leader. The focus will be on leaders' intuitive decision-making processes as they are challenged to guide highly innovative and complex organizations, organizations that are unable to rely on market research or the precedency of industry trailblazers for strategic decisions.

Second, the intention of this research is to present a framework that defines *Brand Leadership* as a distinct and viable leadership paradigm. While some leadership theorists will agree that context plays a vital role in leadership, most leadership theories are seen as a function of a two-part relationship, the leader and the follower (Day, 2001; Rost, 1993). This research will open the leadership conversation to deliberately include a critical third part; the context. In order to make the appropriate decision, such a leader must fully understand the context in which he or she leads, the strength of the organization and the trends of the market, and must be able to connect on an emotional level to all the shareholders of the organization.

Lacking in the professional literature is a comprehensive exploration of the unique challenges that innovative leaders experience. Perhaps this gap in the scholarship is a product of perspective—in most cases, the leadership researchers do not experience, at the same level, the frustration leading innovation. Perhaps we can broaden our understanding of leadership in the 21st century if we focus on intuition and leading with a deliberate focus on innovation.

The next chapter will restate the research question and present multiple methods for consideration. Using Representative Case Research (RCR), which holds convergence of data as the key to a convincing interpretation, I investigate the conundrum of creative leaders, struggling to realize and communicate their full potential as they navigate the complexities of an uncertain market.

# Methodology

## Research Question

The purpose of this research is to invite the possibility of Brand Leadership as a distinct and viable new leadership paradigm. The research question is if there is a need for a new leadership theory and if so, does Brand Leadership offer a new, and viable perspective to the leadership questions of innovative organizations in the 21st century?

Ultimately, my hope is to help create a better world. With the workplace being a significant aspect to many people's lives, their individual and collective work experiences echo throughout all aspects of their lives. The pursuit of better leadership is a noble task.

In the spirit of appreciative inquiry (Fry, 2002), I hope to contribute to the continuously evolving field of brand scholarship by exploring how brand leaders incorporate sensitivity to market trends into organizational strategies. My research examined how, on a micro-level, brand leaders internalize their decision making process and communicate their strategic decisions to key stakeholders and, consequently, the stakeholders' responses to such attempts.

## Considerations for Selecting a Research Methodology

First and foremost, I ascribe to the philosophy that

> research is always carried out by an individual with a life and a worldview, a personality, a social context, and various personal and practical challenges and conflicts, all of which affect the research, from the choice of a research question or topic, through the methods used, to the reporting of the project's outcome. (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 4)

I have come to believe that one's research is intimately connected to their awareness of themselves and the world in which they live. In the greatest scheme, it would be wonderful to have my research have an influence on the world; in the very least I certainly hope that it contributes to my personal development as a human being and a practicing scholar.

Research methods can be classified in various ways; however, one of the most common distinctions is between qualitative and quantitative research methods (Myers & Avison, 2002). Quantitative research methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to study natural phenomena. Examples of quantitative methods now well accepted in the social sciences include survey methods, laboratory experiments, formal methods (e.g. econometrics) and numerical methods such as mathematical modeling (Straub, Boudreau, & Gefen, 2004).

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers studying social and cultural phenomena. "The goal of qualitative research is understanding issues or particular situations by investigating the perspectives and behavior of the people in these situations and the context within which they act" (B. Kaplan & Mazwell, 2005). To this end, qualitative research is conducted in natural settings and uses data in the form of words rather than numbers. Examples of qualitative methods, which are primarily inductive, are action research, case study research and ethnography. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions. The motivation for doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes from our ability to verbalize our lived experience; qualitative research methodologies were designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live (Myers & Avison, 2002). B. Kaplan and Maxwell argue that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified

**Qualitative approach required for generating new theory.** Quantitative research is grounded in the belief that the goal of science is to discover the truths that exist in the world and to use the scientific method as a way to build a more complete understanding of reality. Many quantitative studies include open-ended survey questions, semi-structured interviews, or other forms of qualitative data. The traditional approach of a quantitative scientific study typically proves or disproves an *existing* hypothesis or theories; qualitative approaches are generally used to generate new theory.

According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), influential 19th century sociologist, Max Weber,

> identified four steps for generating new theory: first, articulate the constructs of a theory; second, articulate the relationships among the constructs of a theory; third, articulate the lawful state space by considering the values for the constructs; and finally, articulate the lawful even space of a theory by identifying the changes in state of the constructs for which the theory is expected to hold. (p. 349)

**A methodology that allows for additional discourse.** Some critiques of qualitative research—and of interviewing in particular—are difficult to ignore. Critics argue for the collection of data from multiple sources that might augment the information gathered through the interview process. It takes the highest skill of interviewing to be able to pull out a participant's experience and, even then, it is difficult to accept the information as the truth—even for the participant. Jung famously remarked:

> People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls. They will practice Yoga, observe a strict regimen of diet, or mechanically repeat mystical texts from the literature of the whole world—all because they cannot get on with themselves and not the slightest faith that anything useful could come out of their souls. (as cited in Goleman, 1981, p. 134)

Couldn't the same reasoning, the same resistance to face the most important issues, be applied to groups, organizations and societies? (Strop, 1995).

More recently, the scope of epistemology has widened and many scholars realize that rigorous research may rely on multiple sources of evidence, whose data converges in a triangulating fashion. There is no limit to what might possibly provide rich evidence, and increasingly we are seeing an appreciation for creative data as recorded observations (both video and participatory), focus groups, texts and documents, multi-media or public domain sources, policy manuals, photographs, and autobiographical accounts.

**Introduction to Representative Case Research**

While qualitative and quantitative models clearly offer their own advantages, "they [are] divergent, incomplete, and possibly confusing; the lack of systemic integration between them left our explanations of behavior and our interpretation of meaning unfinished" (Meara, 1990, p. 67). Fortunately, such an epistemological revival is reflecting in methodological diversity. The conversation is moving beyond polarization and rhetoric to new, and acceptable, methods of meaningful research. Contemporary literature presents us with challenges for more explicit integration of science and practice and for the expansion of research and application paradigm and methodologies.

A positive step towards this expansion may be Representative Case Research (RCR) which examines carefully chosen persons one at a time, in depth, to learn how each experiences and manages an event, situation, or set of circumstances or conditions that is important in human life. Qualitative research methodologies involve using,

> purposeful sampling methods to recruit participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study. The concept or the experience under study is the unit of analysis; given that an individual person can generate hundreds or thousands of concepts, large samples are not necessarily needed to generate rich data sets. (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374)

Although diverse, or unbiased sampling with a target population may seem like a reasonable request, it is not. Accessibility to individuals that have experienced the struggles of leading highly branded organizations are limited and arguably not required to insure rigor and trustworthiness.

> Although diverse samples might provide a broader range from which to distill the essence of the phenomenon, data from only a few individuals who have experienced the phenomenon—and who can provide a detailed account of their experience—might suffice to undercover its core elements. Typical sample sizes for [such] studies range from 1 to 10 persons. (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1375)

RCR is a research strategy that comprises an all-encompassing method—with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and to data analysis. In this sense, the case study is not either a data collection tactic or merely a design feature alone but a comprehensive research strategy (Stoeker, 1991).

RCR, originated by Franklin Shontz (1965), is designed to increase the rigor of case study research. It is well planned in advance and can be exploratory, hypothesis testing, or both. It is always guided by specific ideas or questions from the literature or the researcher's own thinking, but with enough flexibility to allow for reworking and modification as the study proceeds (Demick & Miller, 1993).

Representative Case Research was developed from the need to create a more interpretive, dialectical science—an answer to the call for an alternative methodology that respects relationship, context and meaning. RCR constitutes an intense study of one or a series of individuals who embody the process of interest. It has been used to study diverse populations and issues, such as cocaine abusers, adjustment to spinal cord injury and the experience of being HIV positive (Gordon & Shontz, 1990).

RCR recognizes that there are two sources of information: private and public. For example, a researcher may want to investigate the origins of the financial collapse of the subprime mortgage crisis; a private source may be an extensive interview with a displaced financial executive. The public counterpart would be to interview other employees, the displaced homeowner, federal investigators as well as investigate stock reports, internal memos, company reports, and a myriad of financial documents that may provide a more comprehensive insight.

The private perspective of the displaced executive, in this example, may be quite different than the public.

Representative Case Research as a methodology takes the strengths from formerly polarized views and combines these strengths in a methodology that is appealing to both researcher and field worker. The diversity of data resources used in RCR can meet not only the traditional scientific requirements of empirical rigor but also addresses the concern that narrative research relies too heavily on the subjective accounts of narratives.

> *Convergence of the data is the key to a convincing interpretation* [emphasis added] and the methodology allows for this and for a research to be certain of when convergence is present and when it is not. So for the tough minded," RCR is reassuring. By the same token, for the more "tender-hearted," private events are given credibility. The participant who is having the experience is the expert. The individual is not to be quantified or assigned a particular niche when the richness of self-report is forgotten. The unique experience is not generalized out of existence, but rather interpreted in the individual's own terms as well as in the "verifiable" empirical terms of the scientist. (Meara, 1990, p. 68)

**RCR as a subset of case study**. It may be helpful to situate RCR as a subset of case study as well as compare and contrast RCR to Narrative Inquiry. As the name implies, Representative Case Research is a subset of the more recognized method of case study. Yin (2009) suggests that case studies may be the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, or when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context yet "the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations including policy studies, political science, and public administration research, community psychology and sociology, organizational and management studies, and in city and regional planning research, such as in studies of plans, neighborhoods, or public agencies**.** Case studies may be a suitable choice for dissertations and theses in social sciences; the academic disciplines as well as professional fields such as business administration, management science and social work (Yin, 2009, p. 1)

*Abductive methodology.* As a subset of case study, Representative Case Research is an abductive method; it is a form of logical inference that goes from observation to a hypothesis that accounts for the reliable data and seeks to explain relevant evidence (Peirce, 1878). It is both logical and innovative yet it does *not* guarantee a decisive conclusion. Abductive methodologies have a logic inference (considered reasonable and scientific); allowing for the construct of themes and specialized findings. Abductive methodologies are a commodious choice for generating new knowledge "in cases in which there are no adequate preexisting theories of a phenomenon" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 145).

*An accommodating approach.* Case study generally offers two approaches; extensive and intensive. Extensive involves a large set of events, people or organizations to explore a phenomenon. Intensive focuses on a much smaller sample group—even if it is only one.

*A well-known method.* Case study research is defined as "an holistic, empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009, p. 18.) One of the most well-known applications for the case method is as a pedagogical technique that is used as the primary teaching method in MBA classes at Harvard University. The essential tactic and characteristic of case study research is to use different sources of data within each case or cases. These can be primary and secondary data sources or even certain journalistic efforts. Yin (2009) suggests that "one of the best written and most interesting case studies is about the Watergate scandal, written by two reporters from *The Washington Post"* (p. 16).

From a philosophical perspective, a researcher may find case studies to be a refreshing alternative to many other research methodologies as it is not confined to the absolute control of other studies. The case study strategy, Platt (1992) explains, begins with “a logic of design . . . a strategy to be preferred when circumstances and research problems are appropriate rather than an ideological commitment to be followed whatever the circumstances” (p. 46).

In much the same manner as case study research, Representative Case Research is primarily a qualitative research technique and emphasizes the examination of carefully chosen persons one at a time, in depth, to learn how each participant experiences and manages an event, situation, or set of circumstances or conditions. RCR is “guided by holistic conceptions of human nature and emphasizes the *meanings,* rather than the *mechanisms,* [both emphases added] of human actions” (Gordon & Shontz, 1990, p. 69). Instead of merely trying to explain human behavior, it strives to comprehend persons in all their complexity.

While case study research is perfectly suited for investigating “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18.), the methodology is not without fault. A criticism of case research, Meara (1990) contends, is that it “relies too heavily on private reports of participants” (p. 68).

> Our paradigms have relied heavily on either the professional as expert or the “average person” as expert, and thus we have not emphasized the interpersonal context of meaning or made as explicit as we might our implicit beliefs concerning the “social construction of reality.” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 67)

Professionals such as psychologists, teachers, and counselors who use case research, are characterized by their focus on human beings and who, themselves, are human. The recount of their experience can vary tremendously; they design, conduct, interpret, and convey meaning on research that is subject to these complications. The virtues of these “private” complications, Meara (1990) cautions, “have sometimes resulted in incomplete understandings” (p. 67).

**Converging lines of inquiry.** Representative Case Research offers a subtle, yet significant, difference balancing in-depth private, lived experience of the participant with public experience. RCR allows for multiple sources of evidence—or the development of converging lines of inquiry, or triangulation. "The diversity of data sources used in RCR can meet not only the traditional scientific requirements of empirical rigor, but also addresses the criticism that individual case research relies too heavily on private reports of participants" (Meara, 1990, p. 69). The result of these private reports, at times, has resulted in "incomplete understandings . . . the context or paradigm used to interpret meaning has varied with the audience rather than the concepts under study" (p. 67).

With converging lines of inquiry, or triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity also can be addressed, as multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. Documents, films, photographs, psychological testing, life histories, archival records, open-ended interviews, focused interviews, surveys, direct and indirect observations allow an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

**Narrative inquiry compared to RCR.** Narrative inquiry, or narrative analysis, is a research method within the larger framework of qualitative research. Narrative inquiry uses stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos and other artifacts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Capturing the emotion of the moment described, narrative inquiry accepts the idea that knowledge can be held in stories that can be relayed, stored, and retrieved (Fry, 2002). Clandinin and Connelly emphasize the dynamic and dialogical nature of narrative research in their definition:

> Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social

> interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated . . . narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

While the purpose of narrative research is to study personal experience and meaning in a systematic manner it is vulnerable to a fair share of criticism. Truth implies an objective reality, yet the realm of narrative is subjective meaning. One group, using feminist theory, writes of truth in narrative as follows:

> When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was," aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences. . . . Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the worldviews that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters "outside" the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them. (Personal Narrative Group, 1989, p. 261)

Not to be confused with Narrative Inquiry, Representative Case Research addresses the concerns of subjective reliability and validity by balancing public experience obtained from diverse data sources with the in-depth private, lived experience of the participant. Some may consider it to be the best of both worlds. While the individual who is having the experience is still the expert, Meara (1990) contends that,

> convergence of the data is the key to a convincing interpretation: and the methodology allow for this . . . Investigators, supervisors, consultants, and experts can design the research so that the information provided by both empirical and humanistic approaches can be collected, evaluated, and compared. (p. 68)

A research design may be considered to be a "blueprint" of the research, dealing with at least five criteria, according to Yin (2009):

1) Study questions;
2) Its propositions, if any;
3) Its unit(s) of analysis;
4) The logic linking the data to the propositions; and

5) The criteria for interpreting the findings. (p. 20)

Ironically, one may consider the advantage of RCR as also the disadvantage of RCR. Considered one of the most holistic research methodologies, Representative Case Research allows for multiple sources of evidence yet the design is difficult to clearly define.

**Sampling Technique**

Morse (2005) has written that in qualitative research studies, sample size depends on five considerations: the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the quality of the data, the study design, and the use of shadowed data (when participants speak of others' experience as well as their own). She further states that all qualitative sampling is dependent on three principles:

Her first principle is that excellent research skills are essential for obtaining good data. Morse (2005) strongly cautions, "More bad data does not make good data"(p. 122)—if the sampling strategy isn't working then it would be important to change it. Fortunately qualitative inquiry methods are flexible and permit the research to adopt new methods, contingent on necessary ethical approvals as well as permission from one's supervisory committee. Morse's second principle is that it is necessary to locate excellent participants to obtain excellent data. Spradley (1979) explains that an excellent participant has been through or observed the experience under investigation. Ideally, researchers should recruit intentionally (purposefully) from wherever these people may be. If purposeful sampling is not available, primary selection may occur when, according to Morse, a researcher solicits participants with a specific experience. Unfortunately, solicitation enters a dynamic that may threaten the authenticity of the data. The participant might be seeking a monetary reward, may be unable to articulate their experience, or they might simply want someone to talk to, etc. Morse cautions that if it becomes clear that an interview is not going well, or the required information is not accessible, the session should be politely drawn to a conclusion. The data should be labeled and dated; yet the tape does not need to be transcribed, nor incorporated into the study.

Morse's (2005) third principle is that sampling techniques must be targeted and efficient. Excessive data can easily become counter-productive, as the researcher needs to be able to sift and sort through all the information. Computer programs merely assist in placing the data in the best possible position to aid the researcher's cognitive process; yet, unfortunately, such programs cannot do the work. One reason is that "the researcher can only conceptually manage a relatively small amount of data, the data must be significant, pertinent, informative, exciting, and not mundane, obscure, irrelevant, or only tangentially related to the topic" (Morse, 2005, p. 233). There are also limits because our brains can only hold and process so many ideas at the same time; qualitative researchers cannot afford to sift through piles of irrelevant data.

**Criteria for Judging the Quality**

Four concepts have been commonly used to establish the quality of any empirical social research: trustworthiness, credibility, conformability, and data dependability. Because representative case research is a form of empirical research, the four tests are relevant (Yin, 2009).

*Construct validity.* This first test is especially problematic with case studies. Critics have often pointed to the fact that the researcher fails to "develop a sufficiently operational set of measures and that 'subjective' judgments are used to collect the data" (Yin, 2009, p. 41). Over time, Yin summarizes, three tactics have been developed to meet the need for construct validity:

- Offer multiple sources of evidence
- Present a chain of evidence
- Have the draft case study report reviewed by key informants

*Internal validity.* Internal Validity is a concern only for causal (or explanatory) case studies—cases where the researcher tries to determine whether *x* led to event *y.* There may be an unknown third factor, *z*, that may have been created an inference. It is prudent to assume that a case study always involves an inference every time an event cannot be directly observed. The suggestion is to provide convergent evidence, pattern making, explanation building and time-series analysis.

*External validity.* The third test deals with the problem of knowing whether the findings are generalizable beyond the immediate study. Difficult to prove, the test of external validity should undergo the scrutiny and testing of subsequent research. One solution may be to consider other instances where the same conditions have occurred and similar results were experienced.

*Reliability.* The researcher should be sure that subsequent investigators following the same procedure would arrive to the same findings and conclusions. The general way of approaching this issue of reliability is to make the research as operational as possible and to work as if someone was continuously looking over your shoulder. The research should be a clear blueprint for any future investigation and should allow for similar results if performed on a larger sample.

**Designing Representative Case Research**

A solid research design is the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions which are drawn) to the initial inquiry. Every empirical study should have an implicit, if not explicit, research design. Yin (2009) suggests a way of thinking about research design as a "blueprint" (p. 26) illustrating the solution to four problems: what questions to study, what data are relevant, what data to collect, and how to analyze the results. He continues his warning that a strong research design is much more than just a mere plan. The main purpose is to ensure that the evidence does not drift from the main goal of addressing the initial research question.

In stark contrast to the design of a quantitative study, RCR is constructive and qualitative—it is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. The theory or general understanding will emerge as it begins with an initial interest, develop into broad themes, and begins to solidify into specific findings. The exploration and process of such a reduction makes it difficult to prefigure qualitative research tightly at the proposal or early research stage (Creswell, 2003).

It is important to note that a case study design is not something finalized at the outset of the research; the design can be altered and revised after the initial, but with great care. An investigator must be careful not to shift, unknowingly, the theoretical concerns or objectives. The actual cases can be changed, but care must be taken that a bias was not the cause for conducting the research or interpreting the findings.

**The Study's Question and Research Design**

The goal of this research is to explore Brand Leadership as an emerging leadership paradigm—a distinct and viable alternative to existing post-modern leadership theories and practices. In order to do so, it was vital to study multiple cases, or individuals, who have experienced the unique frustrations as leaders in highly branded organizations.

While it would be very interesting to extend the research to include the struggles of the organization, limited our research to the lived-experience of the branding leader—the expert participants referred as the co-investigators.

Considered one of the most holistic research methodologies, RCR holds the ability to incorporate multiple sources of evidence, or converging lines of inquiry, as the key to building a convincing interpretation. Potential issues of construct validity can be addressed as multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. Because I was interested in the unique struggles of a leader in a branded organization, my investigation was based on interviewing methods. Other sources of information included: documents, films, life histories, archival records, open-ended interviews, focused interviews, direct and indirect observations.

**Propositions**

Consistent with the description of my positionality in the opening chapter, this research is based on the core assumption that leaders in highly branded organizations face unique leadership frustrations. Not only do they have to contend with the understood challenges of leadership, they have to use their intuition to make comprehensive decisions based largely upon intuition. In many cases, their decisions cut across the grain of conventional wisdom, quantifiable data and the advice of their closest advisors.

In addition, significant research suggests a fascinating struggle that happens biologically, within the leader. Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) completed significant research on the frustration of expressing intuitive thought processes, and, as noted in the literature review, they coined the phrase verbal overshadowing to describe this phenomenon. As soon as a leader attempts to access the neocortex (memory, hearing, and language mechanisms) to articulate their thoughts, the limbic system (emotional behavior, innovation, motivation, and the core of our decision making process) will shut down.

One can only imagine the conundrum of creative leaders as they wrestle with neurological conflict while, at the same time, trying to lead by articulating the thoughts they have yet to develop. By deepening understanding of these challenges, this research can help develop a positive leadership paradigm that can lead to a better world of personal and organizational fulfillment.

**Units of Analysis**

Consistent with the definitions of the methodology, RCR recognizes the contribution of expert individuals and identifies them as *co-investigators*, or CIs, for the firsthand knowledge and insight they are able to provide.

The CIs in this study were selected according to the five criteria:

1. They had to have experienced leading systemic change in a highly branded organization or as a director in a brand consultant agency.

I chose to study highly experienced brand consultants. While these consultants are external, they play a significant role in realizing the direction of an organization. Not only will a great consultant be required to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organization, the consultant will have a unique perspective; a met-analysis, if you will, of a myriad of branding leader. Often a brand consultant's role will extend beyond the scope of work (SOW) for the project, evolving more into a trusted consultant and confidant.

2. The co-investigator needs to be in a leadership position for at least 10 years. With the purpose of this research being to explore Brand Leadership as a distinct and viable leadership strategy, it was critical to investigate consultants that have significant experience advising the brand initiative of a variety of organizations.

Research suggests that experts in all walks of life begin to mentally categorize information and events into patterns that eventually form a holistic understanding whole system. These ever changing and growing patterns of understanding, or chunks, requires extensive time and effort—10,000 hours or more. Prietula and Simon (2001) further suggest that "in the most rigorous vocations, around 10 years of serious effort are necessary before a person can approach levels of performance regarded as expert"(p. 121). I felt that 10 years was an appropriate amount of time to witness the consequences of their decisions and hopefully the elapsed time has provided an opportunity to self-reflect.

3. The CIs had to be brand consultants in retail-based industries. While other industries, such as service-based industries, have intuitive and innovative branding challenges, this research is concentrated on innovative organizations and isolating the retail industry is a natural constraint to frame the research.
4. The CIs had to be associated with organizations considered to be industry leaders; it was deemed necessary that they have experienced a degree of success. It would not be beneficial to investigate leaders who were not able to stimulate positive changes in their organizations.
5. The CIs had to be successful. While it is, admittedly, difficult to clearly define success (i.e., is it market share, number of employees, growth rate, annual sale revenue, etc.?) I wanted to define a minimum threshold, albeit difficult to define, to the CI's influence. The threshold of success was that each CI had led the branding efforts of at least one Fortune 50 organization.

**Method of selecting participants.** Even if it were possible, it is not required to collect data from everyone in a community in order to obtain purposeful findings. In qualitative research, only a sample of a population is selected for the most rigorous research. The research objectives and the characteristics of the study population determine how many and which people to select; we will limit our research to 3 co-investigator. Two sampling methods were utilized; purposive sampling and chain referral sampling.

*Purposive sampling.* One of the most common sampling strategies for choosing participants—referred to in this study as *co-investigators*— is according to preselecting criteria.

Unlike quota sampling, which is the best option when the number of participants is a fixed requirement, purposive sampling is suitable when the aim is for an approximate rather than exact quota.

*Chain referral sampling.* Also known as *snowballing,* this is a type of purposive sampling; but in this method, people familiar with the research refer additional participants to the investigator. This is a wonderful means to find co-investigators not readily accessible through my immediate network.

**Number of Co-Investigators**

RCR, as a methodology, focuses on the private psychodynamic life-view of the participants as well as the more public converging lines of inquiry. It is not simply another interview methodology and it is perfectly acceptable to have a very limited number of cases

The reason one would consider a single case study is that the case represents a critical, extreme, unique, or revelatory case. If the case study does not fulfill one of these four criteria, a multiple case study should be considered. "The single-case study cannot be regarded as a complete study on its own" (Yin, 2009, p. 49). Many researchers consider the evidence from multiple cases more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriot & Firestone, 1983).

There is no compelling reason to consider a single case study; while the frustrations of Brand Leadership are unique to creative leaders, they are not anomalies. Because there is no pre-determined quota to meet and the number of participants may, inevitably scale with chain referral sampling, the goal of this research was to interview 3 highly qualified co-participants.

The co-investigators were screened using this questionnaire designed to determine their qualifications:

- How long have you been in branding?
- How long have you been a leader in branding?
- Are you currently serving as a change-agent in a branded organization?
- Have you led the branding efforts of a Fortune 50 organization? If so, which one? Was it a retail-based (versus a service-based) operation?
- How many people do you / did you lead on a day-to-day basis?
- Will you be willing to participate in an initial interview session of 60 minutes and possibly four additional sessions of 60 minutes each?

The co-investigators who were selected met all the above criteria and were willing to participate in all phases of the study.

**The Logic Linking the Data to the Propositions**

The CIs functioned as expert consultants in the research project; they were fully informed about all phases and aspects of the study. As co-investigators, the participants were expected to be content experts. My role, in the investigation, was to facilitate the interviews, gather the converging data and make appropriate conclusions. As part of safeguarding the rights of each participant, an Antioch University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was consulted formally approve, monitor, and review the entire process. Several key ethical principles were used, including practicing no deception and assuring confidentiality.

**No deception.** There was no perceived deception, nor any perceived psychological, physical or even mental danger to any participants. The participants were informed that the research would be used as part of the researcher's dissertation and that the findings might be submitted for use at a later date. The CIs had the ability to review all the material before it becomes public information.

**Confidentiality.** While it would be wonderful to allow the research to reflect on "real" leaders with "real" challenges, I understand that the legal ramifications may be a reasonable consideration and, so, I offered the CIs the choice of selecting a pseudonym. The CIs were informed that in the unlikely case that it was necessary to discontinue the study, all data records would be destroyed.

**The Logic Linking the Data to the Propositions**

**Individual interviews.** The primary collection of data was in an interview of the co-investigator. I aimed as much as possible to conduct the interview on site; the goal being to offer a comfortable and secure setting to allow the CIs to discuss as much of their experience as openly as possible. Conducting the interview on site presented additional, albeit unforeseen, opportunities to gather rich information.

With the co-investigators' explicit permission, sessions were recorded. Although a structured format was not be followed, each interview session had explicit goals, best understood in terms of the progress from interview to interview.

*First interview.* The first interview was a chance to introduce the CI to the investigation, begin to build a relationship of trust, set the foundation moving forward and to glean a bit of background information. Career-centered information was requested and a short description—or perceived need—of the research was provided. An expectation for subsequent sessions was provided; time until the second interview gave the participant an opportunity to self-reflect.

Although not formally structured, for the interview I had prepared an array of the questions, used, more or less in the following order to insure covering the most important issues:

1. "In your own words, how would you define the difference between branding and marketing?

2. “There are researchers that say a brand begins internally; that the leaders of an organization hold in trust the ethos of the brand. How important is a leader's personal brand to the success of an organization?”

3. “It appears that the demands on a CEO have become such much greater with the advent of the internet and increased global competition. How have the requirements for leadership changed as well?”

4. “There is a relatively new appointment among the C-Level executives; the adage of a CBO. In some of the most successful organizations, such as Apple, Nike, Starbucks, and Virgin, the CEO has made the majority of the brand related decisions. In your opinion, do CBO's provide a necessary and sustainable advantage?”

5. “Studies show "that in most organizations, two out of three transformations initiatives fail" (Sirkin et al., 2005, p. 110). But there are some great examples of successful rebranding (FedEx, McDonalds, Target, Harley Davidson, J Crew). When should an organization consider rebranding?”

6. “There are a myriad of philosophies and leadership styles. While most leadership theorists agree that context is a significant component, most see leadership as a two-part relationship between the leaders and the followers. Brand Leadership may open the aperture to include a third part, context, as a formal consideration of the ability of the organization, and the direction of the marketplace. In your opinion, is Brand Leadership a unique leadership paradigm? How so?”

7. “There is a well-documented neurological tension that complicates leadership decisions that requires a high level of intuition. Schooler and Engstler-Schooler, (1990) described the conundrum as "verbal overshadowing,” or the tendency of the left-brain, which

controls speech, to shut down the right brain, which is intuition. It is difficult to articulate intuitive thought processes for as soon as they begin to communicate the left-brain shuts down the right. Many creative leaders have a difficult time coping with such a neurological "deficiency." How have you seen leaders cope with such frustration?"

8. "Intuition plays a significant role in navigating the unchartered waters of today's unpredictable marketplace. In many cases, a leader has had to forcibly push their decision (Steve Jobs with the highly controversial Apple commercial, Lee Iacocca with the introduction of the mini-van, etc.) without the support of research data and their closest advisors. Have you experienced a similar struggle with leaders? If so, could you tell us a little bit about it? What lessons did you learn from that experience?"

9. "Intuition, as history has proven, has its dark side as well. How does one evaluate a leader's decision-making process? If it is largely based off of intuition, are there checks and balances that can help evaluate?"

10. "In your personal experience working hand-in-hand with brand leaders, what are the three most important characteristics of successful brand leaders?"

*Second interview.* With the first interview setting a firm foundation, the second interview provided for a deep follow-up. The CIs had had a chance to consider a relevant leadership experience and be willing to go deeper into the experience. With the co-investigators, I discussed representative case research, explaining why I chose the methodology and asking how they would approach the problem.

*Third interview.* After the second interview, I sent each CI a copy of the interview record, along with the themes of the other participants. They were given time to review and respond with corrections and/or additional comments. My hope was that these CIs truly felt like co-Investigators and that the interview records will stimulate deeper reflection and dialogue.

**Additional data collection.** Considered one of the most holistic research methodologies, RCR holds the ability to incorporate multiple sources of evidence, or converging lines of inquiry, as the key to building a convincing interpretation.

While the interview was the primary focus for collecting raw data, I used other opportunities to gather rich information will present them. These data sources included:

- Observations of leaders interactions with staff and environment
- Relevant corporate websites
- Conversations with key shareholders and former or existing subordinates
- Conversations with former or existing board members
- Public data such as stock performance
- Any media associated with communicating corporate mission statement
- Commercials
- Internal corporate communications
- Website communications
- Other site-specific data and practices

## Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis is an iterative, inductive process of decontextualization and recontextualization (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). During decontextualization, the analyst separates data from the original context of individual cases and assigns codes to units of meaning in the texts. In recontextualization, he or she examines the codes for patterns and then reintegrates, organizes, and reduces the data around central themes and relationships drawn across all the cases and narratives. A set of categories or concepts, distilled from textual data, will result in the final product.

As with all research, the final analysis is inherently subjective as the researcher is the instrument for analysis. The researcher (or the research team) makes all the judgments about coding, categorizing, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data. Each of the approaches has its own techniques for monitoring, documenting, and evaluating the analytical process and the researcher's role to assure rigor and trustworthiness (Hermanowicz, 2002).

The answer for detailed analysis and qualitative modeling may be in the use of a Qualtitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package. One such option is NVivo, produced by QSR International. Used predominantly by academic, government, health and commercial researchers, it is suited for working with multi-media information where deep and collaborative analysis is required.

NVivo helps researchers organize and analyze unstructured data; allowing users to explore issues, understand phenomena, and answer questions. The investigator, or team of investigators, can work in close collaboration to test theories, identify trends, and cross-examine data in a multiple ways using its sophisticated query functions. The propriety software supports a plethora of data formats such as PDF, spreadsheets, rich text, plain text, open-ended survey responses, audio files, digital photos, Word, literature reviews, audio recordings, pictures and web pages.

**Transcribe interview.** Immediately after each interview a transcript was generated. The advantage of using a coding program such as NVivo , is that it allows the researcher to experience the data in very unique ways. A "Word Frequency Query" for example, can be generated within minutes and provides a rich visual representation of the frequency in which each word is used (see Figure 3.1).


*Figure 3.1.* A sample of a word frequency illustration generated from NVivo 10.

**Broad themes**. The interview results were organized into broad themes for additional analysis, and a list of predominant themes and impressions was created. NVivo10 is able to construct a scoring grid, organizing all narrative responses to the emerging themes.

**Supportive supplementary interviews**. In the course of conducting primary interviews, many suggestions were made for additional brand leaders who, the co-investigators felt, could enrich my appreciation for the context and emerging themes of the work. Accordingly, I held nine supportive interviews, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

## Criteria for Interpreting the Findings

**Reliability.** Reliability usually refers to the dependability of the data, and careful, systematic analytic methods to insure the closest possible representation from the raw data stage through analysis is a necessary criterion for conducting investigative research. The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in the study (Yin, 2009). A great way to address reliability is to make as many steps as operational as possible and, as Yin suggests, "conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder" (p. 37). Meara (1990) refers often to the distinction between private versus public data—private being an individual's highly subjective and unique experience, versus an experience or perspective that is held by more people and in a more public fashion. A well-investigated case study or published biography would be perfect examples of such public data.

**Validity.** To ensure validity, the following strategies were used (based on Creswell, 2003, p. 204):

- Triangulation of data. The data was collected through multiple sources to include interviews, observations and document analysis;
- Member checking. The co-investigators were invited to check work throughout the analysis process. An ongoing dialogue regarding my interpretations of the co-investigator's reality and meanings will ensure the truth value of the data;
- Long term and repeated observations at the research site. Regular and repeated observations of similar phenomena and settings occurred on-site;
- Peer examination. The co-investigators served as peer examiners;

- Participatory modes of research. The co-investigators were involved in all phases of the study;
- Clarification of researcher bias. This has been articulated in the first chapter here.

**Summary**

My research has created an awareness and appreciation for the fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative methodology. It is not so much the choice of a preferred methodology—inferential statistics versus interpretive interviewing—but an expression of an individual's worldview and, in my case, the need for a method designed to construct new theory. Even though I respect and appreciate the strength of a quantitative approach of evaluating a large sampling, I struggle with the philosophy that rigorous research is merely deductive—whose lifeblood is merely to support or validate existing theory.

Representative Case Research fits within my personal philosophy of research and is congruent with my philosophical worldviews. While respecting each co-investigator's private life, the method offers the potential of eliciting detail information of the participants' lived experience. Considered one of the most holistic research methodologies, it takes advantage of multiple data sources as the key to building a convincing interpretation.

Results of the research appear in the fourth chapter while the fifth presents the Conclusions and a discussion of the implications for leadership and change management.

# Results

A total of 12 interviews were conducted: three were primary interviews with co-investigators representing experts across a broad crosscut of professional roles and life experiences. An additional nine interviews were conducted as supportive interviews; the information gathered from these sessions provides a context for and further information about the three principal co-investigators and their influence in the industry.

With all three of the primary interviews, I was surprised by how much interest the co-investigators showed in the research. Each participant asked for a sampling of the questions and it was clear that each had given the questions significant consideration. Two of the interviews (Kelly Mooney and Ken Nisch) were conducted in their office, while the third (Stephen Jay) was held at a local coffee shop, per his request.

Not everyone I contacted agreed to be interviewed. To postulate the reason is beyond the scope of this research; it could have been a reluctance to compromise their client's confidentiality, or an apprehension to expose their personal weaknesses as a leader. On the other hand, it may be as simple as not having the discretionary time. In any case, it is safe to assume that each interview was conducted with participants who were fully willing to engage in a meaningful dialogue.

## Primary Co-Investigators

**Stephen Jay**. At the time of the interview, Stephen Jay was the Managing Director for Fitch, North America. FITCH is a subsidiary for WPP, a British multinational company traded as WPP in the LSE and as WPPGY on the NASDAQ. With 179,000 people in 3,000 offices across 11 countries and producing over $72 billion in annual revenue, WPP is the largest advertising and public relations company in the world.

FITCH (formerly Richardson Smith) is WPP's branding and design agency for North America. Based in Columbus, Ohio, FITCH enjoys a well-deserved reputation as being an industry leader. WPP (NASDAQ: WPPGY) is the world's largest communications services group, with billings of $71.7 billion and revenues of $16.1 billion, providing national, multinational and global clients with advertising; media investment management; customer insights; public relations and public affairs; branding & identity, healthcare communications, direct, digital, promotion and relationship marketing and specialist communications.

WPP companies provide communications services to clients worldwide including 344 of the Fortune Global 500; 63 of the NASDAQ 100 and 33 of the Fortune e-50.

Collectively, WPP employs over 162,000 associates in 3,000 offices in 110 countries (WPP Company Profile, 2014). Besides the glory of working with a long list of Fortune 500 organizations, the design firm was awarded Design Firm of the Year in 2013 and 2014, by RDI (Retail Design International).

As a member of Fitch's Global Senior Management Team, Stephen Jay is an influential member of the organization's leadership. Prior to his tenure at Fitch, Stephen Jay served as the Executive Vice President at Big Red Rooster in Columbus Ohio.

According to one of the supportive interviewees, Amy Stafford, Stephen Jay is

> a strategist that pulls from both sides of his brain. He provides a lot of invaluable insight to projects he leads. Anyone who has worked with him as their leader can vouch for me when I say it's a distinct pleasure to work with him and watch his team do business . . . Stephen is a very passionate leader. He has a certain intellectual charm . . . and has the ability to make clients melt before him.

Another supportive interviewee, Eric Daniel concurs and adds,

> [Stephen Jay] is one of the few brand leaders out there who understands how to take on any niche or category . . . Stephen's one of the few people I've ever met that is truly right brain/left-brain. You'll be hard pressed to find another head figure who is as honest, who is as compassionate or caring as he is.

> I would recommend him in any business practice or strategy process. He can tap into a brand's persona, see what needs to be done and articulate the business challenges that a company faces. He doesn't really find many problems, he only wants to find solutions and he does a great job at finding those solutions. If I had to summarize what kind of person Stephen Jay was, I would say that he's an intellectually curious branding genius with a heart for everything he does and compassion for his colleagues, coworkers and clients.

I personally had met Stephen Jay in 2008 when I had applied for a Business Development Director position with Big Red Rooster. While I did not get the job, we stayed in touch. Our interview was, per his request, in the morning at a small, local coffee shop near his home.

**Kelly Mooney (CEO of Resource Ammarati).** Kelly Mooney assisted in the growth of Resource to become the country's largest independent digital marketing agency (women founded and operated) by challenging the conventions of how customers connect with brands. Recognizing early on that the web-empowered world had forever flipped the marketing equation from top/down to bottom/up, she literally wrote the book on today's open brand era, *The Open Brand* (K. Mooney & Rollins, 2008), providing a much-needed new playbook for brands.

The roots of Mooney's customer-centric point of view come from her education in industrial design at The Ohio State University. She joined Resource Ammarati in 1995 and quickly became its first chief experience officer, then President for a decade, before being named CEO in 2011. Under her direction, the firm expanded its client base into retail and customer packaged goods, attracting clients that include CVS, P&G, Kohl's, Nestlé/Purina and Victoria's Secret.

Mooney has been a primary driver of the firm's legacy of innovation, spearheading projects such as the first Google Glass app for a major retailer (Sherwin-Williams' ColorSnap Glass) and launching the firm's Innovation Lab, as one of the first industry-leading practices in social, mobile, and ecommerce.

Christopher Celeste, founder and partner of Hatch, provided a raving recommendation for Mooney:

> Kelly Mooney is one of the most intelligent & creative individuals with whom I have ever worked. When I first joined Resource in 1997, Kelly was leading long-range strategic planning, and over the following four years she would be instrumental in every major growth initiative undertaken by Resource, eventually becoming a Partner and President of the company.
>
> Whether pursuing new business, plotting strategy, inspiring creative ideas, authoring two books or leading a company of 250+ associates; Kelly is one of those rare individuals whose high expectations of herself raises the bar for all those around her, colleagues and clients alike. Of all the peers I have had the good fortune to work with side-by-side, she is one I miss the most.

In addition to *The Open Brand* (2008), Mooney is the author of *The Ten Demandments* (2002). and has been featured in other notable marketing books, including *Decoding the New Customer Mind, Gen Buy, Loyalty Marketing* and *Customers Rule*. She is an Innovation Advisor at The Ohio State University Fisher College of Business and serves on the Board of Trustees for Columbus College of Art and Design (CCAD). She is also a member of YPO (Young Presidents' Organization) and Shop.org.

I feel like I have always known of Kelly Mooney; *The Open Brand* was one of the first branding books that I read and it inspired me to begin my own PhD journey.

Roger Blackwell, Mooney's former marketing professor at The Ohio State University, is a mutual friend and was kind enough to introduce us. The interview, which took place in a small conference room in the corporate office of Resource Interactive, was the first time I met her.

As all the other co-investigators, Mooney had requested a copy of the questions, but as I set up my recording devices, her body language was quite reserved (she sat back with her arms and legs crossed) and the very first question I asked, “How would you define the difference between marketing and branding?” was received by Mooney asking me how I would define the difference. That first exchange startled me a bit, but overall the conversation was warm and Mooney's responses were brilliant.

**Ken Nisch (Chairman of JGA, Inc)**. Enjoying a reputation as one of the world's most recognized names in retail and branding, JGA & Associates delivers specialty retail solutions for an international clientele. Founded in 1971, their roster of clientele ranges from some of the most iconic international brands to the independent retailer; most of their work is designing flagship stores and boutiques. Nisch became JGA President in 1987 and Chairman in 1995. As Chairman, he works internationally with responsibilities that include project strategy and client liaison. His customer knowledge and entrepreneurial insights are integrated into conceptual development and strategic image positioning for retail operators, manufacturers, and brand marketers.

Ken Nisch enjoys a well-deserved reputation as an industry leader in the retail design space and has been recognized worldwide for his achievements in the field. Retail Magazine has recognized Nisch as a "Retail Luminary" and as a "Retail Influencer" multiple times, being named among a select group of visionaries considered to have demonstrated "unparalleled creative excellence." Recently Nisch was presented with the Retail Leadership Award at the Asia Retail Congress in Mumbai, India. In 2010, he was also inducted into the Retail Design Institute Legion of Honor, recognizing his outstanding career achievement in the field of retail design.

I met Ken Nisch seven years ago. An executive recruiter had connected the two of us about the possibility of me becoming his managing director when I declined, having accepted a position with Horze, an equestrian retail manufacturer in Lahti, Finland.

One of the secondary interviews was with Jim, a director with Restoration Hardware. His first interaction with Ken was when he was working for Northface and heard him speak at a

National Retail Federation Conference (NRFC) in 1998. After the conference, they hired JGA Associates to create a new retail prototype that has served as the model for over 200 locations.

In our interview, Nisch said “there is no such thing as a small detail” and “his right brain/left brain instincts are very, very, very attuned to the larger customer experience.” Jim Thomsen continued his glowing review of Ken and affirms that “[Nisch] is passionate about branding and is able to see the big picture. It’s a really rare quality and it gives his clients a lot of confidence in him.”

The interview was conducted at a conference room at JGA corporate office in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**Supportive Interviews as Converging Lines of Inquiry**

With converging lines of inquiry, the potential problems of construct validity can be addressed, as multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. The additional interviews were conducted to provide a second source of data; the interviewees were individuals who knew the primary co-investigators and were able to provide validation to their influence in the industry as well as their individual leadership styles.

Again, not everyone to whom I contacted agreed to be interviewed. To postulate the reason that they were unwilling to conduct an interview is, again, beyond the scope of this research; it could have been a reluctance to compromise their relationship with the co-investigator, and perhaps it was as simple as not having the available time. In any case, I was surprised how difficult it was to secure the supportive interviews and found it curious that none of them requested a sample of the questions I would ask before the interview. Once the interview began, they were agreeable but most did not show the level of interest or enthusiasm as the primary co-investigators.

The supportive interviews were with the following:

- Lee Peterson, EVP, Strategy, Brand, & Design at WD Partners;
- Dietrich Eubank, Senior IT Project Manager at The Ohio State University (formerly Resource Ammarati);
- Jonathon Davis, Senior Software Developer at Klarna (formerly with Resource Ammarati);
- Jim Thomsen, Vice President and General Manager, Outlet Division at Restoration Hardware;
- Scott Jeffrey, Chief Creative Officer, Interbrand;
- Michelle Smith, Developer at Resource Ammarati;
- Amy Stafford, Account Director at Fitch;
- Eric Daniels, Executive Creative Director, Fitch;
- Michelle Isroff,, Vice President, Director of Environments, Big Red Rooster.

**Overview of Interview Process**

All participants signed an IRB agreement (See Appendix A: Participant Consent) acknowledging that all conversations were recorded.

Each interview began with a rather informal exchange establishing personal connections and an abbreviated overview of my research. Once the interview began, I used my iPhone to record the dialogue.

There was a stark difference between the primary and the supportive participants. The primary CIs displayed a genuine appreciation for the topic, easily shared their philosophical perspectives, and generally engaged in an invigorating debate. From a researcher's perspective, all primary interviews were very interesting to conduct.

Conversely, while the supportive interviewees all agreed to an interview, Lee Peterson, Jim Thomsen, and Michelle Isroff were able to add the most content to the leadership discussion. All three are quite accomplished; Lee Peterson is an executive vice-president with WD Partners and is a frequent speaker in the branding industry. Jim Thomsen is currently Vice President and Managing Director with Restoration Hardware and formerly a Director with The North Face. Michelle Isroff is a VP of design at Big Red Rooster. All three could have been considered primary co-investigators.

It is critical to note that the six supportive interviewees were no strangers to success; they worked as consultants for some well-known corporations and were, at one degree or another, leaders in their own right.

The audio recordings were transcribed and stored electronically in a secure environment. The transcripts were sent to the primary co-investigators for their review—not one participant requested edits.

The approved transcripts were initially coded using NVivo 10, software designed to organize and analyze qualitative data. Unfortunately, the result did not seem to provide adequate results and I switched to a more traditional coding method; categories listed beside their corresponding paragraphs. A table (See Appendix B: Emerging Themes) was constructed to identify and arrange categories and sub categories with their supportive text segment.

A third party, methodology specialist, Dr. Dianna Ridgewell, of Virginia Tech University, analyzed the coded transcripts.

**Emerging Themes**

I used an iterative process of interviewing; although I had prepared questions (see previous chapter), I was open to pursue explore opportunities as they were presented. Each co-investigator had asked for a sample of interview questions in advance, suggesting that they took the interview seriously and the session was more of a deep reflection than a rambling discussion.

**Branding as the higher order in an organization.** The leading question, "Describe the difference between marketing and branding" was to center the discussion to the individual experience of the co-investigator. There are undercurrents in the literature that suggest branding is merely another passing trend in marketing, a new topic to keep the conversation relevant. While such sentiments may have stimulated a myriad of theoretical explanations, I wanted to hear how the co-investigators, personally, contextualized branding.

When compared to marketing, all three primary co-investigators situated branding as the higher order.

> Mark Bloemhard: In your own words, how would you describe the difference between marketing and branding?
>
> Ken Nisch: A brand message is different than marketing in that it does not necessarily change; it has to do with one's essence and value proposition. [Branding] is fundamental and underlying. Marketing is more technique.
>
> One uses marketing to talk about the brand in [multiple] ways depending on the audience. A brand is *inelastic*, whereas marketing is highly *elastic* and is used to get people's attention. You can use marketing to keep the message fresh and to have fun with it. Take Northface, for example. Their brand is "Never Stop Exploring" but if they are talking to an outdoor enthusiast, they're going to have a message more focused on performance. If they're talking to an urban customer, they might have a message around the feature and benefits of the product.
>
> And to the same question:
>
> Kelly Mooney: I definitely think branding is the higher order idea because branding includes everything. Branding is sort of the internal truths. Branding is *defining* what the organization wants to be and what promise it's going to deliver and *all* of its manifestations which, may or may not, include marketing; for example, customer service. [Marketing does not address how] we interact with people, how do we greet them, what happens when something goes poorly?

Mooney touches on key differentiation that underlines Ken Nisch's description; there is a limitation of marketing as a promotional activity. In this case, she clearly points out there are customer touch points, such as customer service, which are not covered by marketing, yet are essential components to the brand.

Stephen Jay concurs and adds, "Branding is far more important than just advertising [or marketing]. A brand is brought to life thru experience, [marketing] through media is passive awareness . . . totally different than engagement through branding." Ken Nisch emphasizes that

> branding is far, far, far more than image creation and projection through media . . . it is understanding the market, sensing the market, identifying unmet and unexpressed needs and figuring out how that brand can deliver an experience for them.

Experiencing the brand was a prominent theme throughout the interviews. Jay asserts,

> At Fitch we offer a concept called PHD, or physical, human, and digital. When everything is in harmony, we call them 'experience signatures', or a collection of deliberate touch points that are quintessential expressions of the brand.

Everything, from the promotional marketing activities to the customer service response when something goes wrong, needs to be aligned with a well-articulated brand. For, as Kelly Mooney stated, "It is hard to do marketing without having a clearly defined brand;" Ken Nisch concurred: "in this new era, the organization structure is flipped; branding is the higher order in that you can't create brilliant brands through marketing or advertising."

**There are times an organization needs to re-consider its brand.** Much of the branding activity revolves around re-branding as organizations often find that their brand was never clearly articulated and if it was clearly articulated, the organization, over time, has drifted from the core brand.

> Mark Bloemhard: How do you know when an organization knows it is time to consider a re-branding campaign?
>
> Kelly Mooney: Re-Branding should be considered when there is a merger or when the initial brand has outgrown what they stand for . . . when their historical target has shifted or when they have a new offering that cannot be believed in their current brand.
>
> We have a lot of clients whose customers have aged; you cannot just take an old brand and start talking in a younger voice. Branding should be an evolving process; if it is

> done correctly, there are very few times one needs to come in for an official re-branding process.

Ken Nisch believes that if there is a strong brand leader that has continuously evolved the brand, a re-branding process is not a necessary activity; “if there is not a strong brand leader, often the founder (such as Starbucks) has to return to get it back on track.”

Stephen Jay expressed that the strongest brands begin internally, and , following Simon Sinek, asks the vital question of why as “a great way to structure a brand.”

> A lot of great brands are analytical monsters but that works well for making incremental improvements; a marginal point here or enhancing their reputation. When a company wants to do something truly remarkable, they need to get into unchartered waters and no amount of research is going to point them to the solution . . . If the brand has lost their way, the leadership need to have the courage to request outside help.
>
> Our job, as brand consultants, is to come in to help find and tailor their intuition into something that is commercially viable—from a customer’s point of view. Intuition will get you so far. It takes experience to bridge the commercial realities and demands. Organizations have to stay tuned to the customer, what they want, what they need, and one is not going to lose in the long run.

Jim Thomsen, the Director of Store Development for Restoration Hardware, echoed this sentiment. He recalled how, in the economic recession of 2008 the CEO of Restoration Hardware, Gary Friedman, made a “gutsy” move. While all their competitors opted for the conventional strategy of cutting prices, Friedman used the opportunity to reposition the organization; to move “upmarket” with higher quality products, a better infrastructure and higher pricing.

Restoration Hardware’s gamble to forsake conventional wisdom was a difficult decision. The decision ultimately positioned the organization as the industry leader, the opposite could have just as easily happened. While Friedman surrounded himself with a group of trusted advisors, the decision was ultimately his to make. Although his decisions were primarily intuitive, the framework for all his decisions was, as he put it, to “stay close to the customer.”

***The Open Brand.*** Now, more than ever before, it is critical to stay close to the customer. In 2008 Kelly Mooney (with Nina Rollins) wrote the controversial book, *The Open Brand,* predicting a shift in power between brands and customers with customers becoming the new authority. The theory was initially rejected as being too idealistic, but over time (and the advent of the smart phone) the concept is now accepted as industry truism.

*The Open Brand* was a book ahead of its time and when it first came out reaction was really disappointing because, in many ways brands, clients, and others saw it as too idealistic and rejected it. Social media were rudimentary at the time: Mark Zuckerberg was still in his dorm and YouTube was not a phenomenon. Nobody was using Twitter. Mooney opined: "It's kind of funny, like, almost 5 years later everybody was like 'well duh, of course this is what the impact of social media is.'"

> So, it was definitely before its time. Brands are being defined by the participation of their customers and communities. They have a voice and are molding the brands versus having something pushed at them. People need to feel like they are a *part* of the brand, not just a customer of it.

Having successfully predicted one major development with *The Open Brand*, Kelly Mooney indicates that she is trying "to figure out the next iteration."

> The evolving role of Brand Leadership.
>
> Mark Bloemhard: There is a relatively new appointment among the C-Level executives; the adage of a CBO. In some of the most successful organizations, such as Apple, Nike, Starbucks, and Virgin, the CEO has made the majority of the brand-related decisions. In your opinion, do CBO's provide a necessary and sustainable advantage or is it a crutch for what the CMO should be doing?
>
> Stephen Jay: A CMO is usually focused on managing the immense marketing budget (again, marketing being the technical promotional activity of the brand) and many do not have the bandwidth to focus on [branding].

Kelly Mooney remarks that she "has been passionately advocating CBOs for a long time." The maturity of the organization plays a significant role. For a company with $100 million a year in revenue, the CEO may also be the CBO, but at some point a different level of expertise is required. She stated:

> I just spoke at a chief digital officers' conference and some people were like "oh my God, I can't believe we now have a CDO" but some companies need it because they've got the marketing person who has got to keep all the activities for a thousand stores going on, then you've got the IT person whose kind of keeping all the enterprise systems running, but the notion of innovation and how to advance the customer experience that involves a lot of technology *and* creative *and* marketing can't really get done by one of those when they're doing their day job.

A CBO represents a new level of orchestration. In the past, a company would have the leader of a division (a channel or store) but now people are accessing the brand in a myriad of ways and there needs to be continuity. The titles may vary (some may call it the chief experience officer, or CXO (see G. Heath, 2015) but the concept is the same. For Mooney, the titles are absolutely critical as they are created to build internal momentum. Such titles, which represent corporate principles, are critical to build momentum and to move a concept, as she put it, "from theory to function."

Ken Nisch clearly expressed that "the functions of a CEO are continuously changing." He recalled a seminar he attended in which the speaker listed the top 10 concerns of a board of trustees. The past year most of the concerns had to do with Internet security and financing. Five years before, the list of concerns was completely different. When they had hired a leader back then, branding was not necessarily at the top of the list; yet at the end of the day, they still needed to connect (on a meaningful level) with their core customer group.

Nisch suggested:

> The requirements of leadership are changing so rapidly that now even "Omni channel" is considered obsolete simply because it has the word "channel" in it. The "CBO" was, at one point, generally the founder because they *were* the brand, but now companies are looking someone from the outside to take over the functions of the position—a new phenomena.

Just recently the CEO of Lowes decided that they will put a CXO (Customer Experience Officer) at the center of the organization, not just at the center of the marketing department, but of the entire organization. With such a move, they have clearly made a commitment to put the shopper at the center of their universe and it reflects on their organizational structure; it is a sign of how form is following function.

**The unique struggles of brand leaders.**

> Mark Bloemhard: There's a well-documented neurological tension that complicates leadership decisions that require a high level of intuition. This conundrum is also called verbal over-shadowing, the tendency of the left brain (speech) is to shut down the function of the right brain, which is intuition. Many creative leaders have a difficult time coping with a neurological deficiency.

> A Supportive Interviewee: I have thought a *lot* about this and have done a bit of research on my own. I'm familiar with verbal overshadowing, and I completely believe that such a phenomena exists. While there is much disagreement on the right brain/ left brain, there is not much agreement as to the function of the corpus callosum. As far as I understand, the corpus callosum's sole function is to divide the brain. This frustration happens much, much more than I care to admit, or actually care to remember. In fact, I'd say *all* my creative bosses were verbally abusive and many actually threw things. I call it *the asshole factor*. [A former boss, an award winning creative director] would throw temper tantrums and I'd often wonder what I would do if something actually hit me. She'd be screaming and I'd stare at her thinking, "I'm gonna lose an eye today . . . I just know it." As long as she kept winning awards, no one seemed to care.

> MB: You've got to be kidding me.

> A Supportive Interviewee: Nope. Not at all. In fact, like I said, they all did it. The funny part is that afterwards, it'd be awkward for a little bit, but I think that they justified their actions by calling it was passion. Even though I really don't want to be like any of them, I would process it by saying that it was a failure in communication; they didn't have the tools to communicate what they were thinking.

> MB: I've got to ask, in your opinion, what are those tools they are missing?

> A Supportive Interviewee: I really don't know. I think about it all the time and I really don't know. Perhaps they simply don't have the ability to communicate in an appropriate manner.

Kelly Mooney has also thought about the struggle between the right and left brain yet was not convinced by the research:

> That's not familiar to me as a well-known struggle. I guess I never . . . I know right brain and left brain and all that but they're inner-connected hemispheres so it's not a piece of research or a situation that I'm as knowledgeable about nor do I know if I even agree with it.
>
> I think that creative people are so visually oriented and they can't understand why other people aren't either and it's so obvious to them. I work with a lot of people who have really strong intuition and they get, I don't know what's going on with the left brain per se, but I think they get frustrated.
>
> I just came out of a similar meeting like this just now, that, there were three of us that were so creatively/visually oriented that the solution was obvious and the fact that it had to be explained or articulated or clarified was sort of interesting/frustrating moment because the answer seemed so obvious. Trying to figure out, well what did they not know what did they not get? So in some ways, it's the inability to articulate it because you can't understand why it's not obvious to anybody else. I don't know, it's an interesting, but I mean I think that the creative people are just, they have learned to connect dots so I think that, they don't know why or they can't explain why they're doing or how they're doing it, they're just doing it.

While Mooney does agree that creative leadership presents unique challenges, these are often not accurately portrayed in the media,

> Many of the most well known stories are from the distant past and they are the most interesting stories because they are super controversial moments. However, if you take the temperature in those environments, most people are not really happy working there.

Mooney suspects that the most interesting stories are sensational journalism; stories that are easy to write about and easy to sell. Considering Isaacson's (2011) biography, *Steve Jobs*, Mooney believes that the readers are left with one of two reactions: either you finish the book thinking that Steve Jobs was a genius, or end up thinking that Steve was "a complete asshole" and "cannot stand for anything he stood for." The majority of real answers, Mooney contends, happen in a conference room with a group of creative individuals quietly collaborating together.

Stephen Jay believes that the hardest job "is first and foremost, to define what your brand stands for and to come up with plans, tactics and strategies to execute against that." Part of that job, he argues, is to create "alignment" so as "to actually mobilize an organization." A leader cannot tell everyone what to do at every level of the organization. The leader must set a clear brand message and if it is clear enough, the rest of the organization will be able to make intuitive decisions that are aligned with the organizational strategy. An organization that is dependent on the leader making all the decision is not an organization posed for growth. In fact, Mooney believes that the "biggest change in leadership" is the need to collaborate, as "the answers aren't necessarily going to come from the top. [The leaders] set the direction but the problem solving has to come from other [individuals] who therefore exhibit creative leadership abilities."

Unfortunately, the opposite is more often the case, she indicates. "A lot of specialty retail companies are just in service to the leader, versus the brand or the customer or the purpose of the business overall . . . I think that is unhealthy in terms of a corporate construct." Mooney believes that even if Steve Jobs' personality was not so abrasive, his behavior is still is not an appropriate method for dealing with the biggest change in leadership that is collaboration at an unprecedented level. She concluded:

> Leadership has to happen at every level . . . it's [not just] the person who's in charge. We are trying to cultivate leaders who can lead meetings, lead moments, and lead themselves. Those are the things that really matter, I think, because you can have followers of the youngest people in the business can be considered really strong creative leaders because they do a great job of bringing people together and getting people excited about the problem and collaborating effectively and getting a great outcome but they don't theoretically have a management type.

Interestingly enough, Lee Peterson also touched on the issue of scalability and what he refers to as "service to the leader" when asked about Ken Nisch's leadership style. While Peterson readily agreed that Nisch was a recognized industry leader, his opinion was that Nisch's creative firm, JGA & Associates, may suffer from scalability issues associated with Nisch's prominent reputation. If everyone knows and wants to "work with Ken," then scaling the firm becomes a challenge. The key may be in recruiting and retaining strong Brand Leadership.

**Finding qualified brand leaders.** As the managing director for one of the largest branding agencies in the world, Stephen Jay feels that

> It is difficult to recruit and retain creative individuals that have analytical skills. When someone has the full package (extremely talented, creative, out-of-the-box thinkers and are able to make connections) these people are the "full package" and are in high demand. Such individuals are very, very rare.

Michelle Isroff concurs:

> Most creative directors are directors . . . they aren't leaders. They tend to revert back to the I'll-know-it-when-I-see-it approach to anything that requires intuition. It's pretty frustrating to work with such people.
>
> I think back on my experience with my bosses and many were so driven by their ego. You need to have an ego to pitch to clients, but you need to be humble enough to listen to your team. The worst bosses, for me, were the ones that would change my work without telling me why. I'd come back the next day and see some significant changes, but there would be no discussion. As a follower, I can only imagine, then, that the change was a result of their ego and not a well thought through strategy. I think that there are designers and there are thinkers. The designers do, and do well . . . the thinkers are the leaders. But it's a hard balance. A delicate balance. Some lean too far on their intuition, others lean too far on their numbers. A leader should always look at the solution from a responsible point of view: how would the customer think about this?

"Brand leadership," Stephen Jay asserts, "is seriously lacking in most organizations." He went on to say,

> It is true that not all organizations succeed by marketing, some succeed because they are price leader and that requires a whole different set of expertise, logistics, and manufacturing. It is just *hard* to be the cost leader in the long run.
>
> There are many organizations, big companies, big brands, that have never articulated what their brand means or what their brand stands for. If they have, the put it on a shelf and they don't live it internally and celebrate it internally in a manner with great cohesive agreement among all the key functions of the business.
>
> To be remarkable, to stand out, to stretch your organization so one is worthy of being "remarked" is a high bar. You do not get to it by accident or by pumping a ton of money on ads or even products. It takes an immense amount of discipline and a brand [leader] that understands all these things.
>
> Organizations that are driven by the vision of the founder provide greater ROI. They have a very, very strong product focused vision and they are constantly molding and shaping that collection of development decisions, product related decisions, and branding decisions to create a sort of perfection, and customers get it.

"Unfortunately," Kelly Mooney asserts, "finding brand leaders may not necessarily be the highest priority for all corporate boards." While the benefits are clearly evident, the process takes far too long for most investments. Most investors are looking for a short-term solution (three to five years) and simply do not have patience to consider anything longer.

Ken Nisch has discovered the same problem, "Branding is more of an investment while marketing is more transactional." Founders, such as Steve Jobs, have a longer vision and greater control, so they are more interested in the long term benefits of branding**.**

**Intuition. "**The problem," according to Stephen Jay, "is that most brands are analytical monsters. They can able to make incremental changes, but to do something truly remarkable, they need to get into unchartered waters and no amount of research is going to point them to the solution they are looking for." Data is critical, but it is only one input; decisions can easily be paralyzed by it. It is critical to have leaders who can lead with intuition.

**"**The role of intuition," according to Jim Thomsen, "becomes greater the higher one gets in the organization." The difference between his decisions as a VP and the decisions made of the CEO are significant; his are largely calculated, while the CEO's decisions are sailing unchartered waters.

Kelly Mooney believes that it is up to the leader to clearly communicate the purpose of the organization; that is the brand. Once the brand is clear, then everyone in the organization should have a form of intuition.

Stephen Jay adds:

> The problem is that the larger organizations resist intuition with a strong gravitational pull towards the status quo. Status quo is a strong, powerful force especially in a publicly traded company and it takes a huge amount of energy to overcome that inertia.

Such forces, Jay asserts, are "unbelievably powerful" and are the main reason why disruption happens in smaller companies; they can do it. It is critical that checks and balances are deliberately set in place. Jay believes that in order for intuition not to steer the organization off track, it is critical to have challengers in the mix, “for if we all agree, that can get a bit dangerous.”

An ongoing theme among the co-investigators is the need, as Nisch put it, “to stay close to the customer . . . To what they want, to what they need and you’re not going to lose in the long run.” Asking “why?” is a great way to structure a brand; to prevent one from drifting and grasping for straws. Larger companies frequently use what he calls “stage-gates,” or governors to make sure that the organization is pushing to an optimal solution. Such stage-gates serve as validation in the hope of maximizing the Return on Investment (ROI).

**Continuous innovation.** In order to maximize the ROI, brands need to keep innovating to stay relevant. Ken Nisch believes that a brand is a reflection of an individual’s view of a culture and it needs to continuous evolve. If one considers Abercrombie and Fitch, for example, it is painfully clear that the brand has lost its ability to innovate; to stay relevant. For twenty years the uber brand “got it right” and dominated the fickle upscale youth casual wear market. Unfortunately, Abercrombie and Fitch has fallen on some branding hard times and has actually “become a caricature for cool kids, a mockery, and has, actually, been discarded by the cool kids.”

The difference between brands such as Abercrombie and Fitch and Apple is in their attitude and eventually in their stock performance, Nisch postulates. Great brand leaders are continually innovating as they are “students of the world . . . they are not finished; they are always willing and able to evolve.”

> There is a difference between Abercrombie and Fitch and Apple. A&F, in spirit, believe that they have completed their journey—the book has been written and now they are making a movie. Apple, on the other hand, is unwritten. It’s still in the making and it’ll actually be better the next time around.
>
> “A great brand” Nisch stresses, “can, and will, never rest on their laurels.”

**Large B branding versus small b branding.** *Small b branding* is the term for brands that have crept in under the large marketing budget radar. Some may argue that Small b is similar to guerilla marketing, a "term used for unorthodox advertising, usually used to promote small-to-medium business's in a low cost, yet attention grabbing manner (Guerilla marketing, n.d., para.1).

Yet, there is a significant difference between Small b branding and guerilla marketing. Guerilla marketing is still marketing; it simply chooses wit over budget (Levinson, 2007). "Small b" branding is more than a function of branding versus marketing. It is a deep philosophy that bigger may not always be better. To illustrate Small b branding, Ken Nisch described an upscale, organic grocery chain based in Michigan. It has a powerful market presence but the]ambition is not, at this moment, to grow as fast as possible. The firm is a private company and is perfectly content to make a respectable living. While it continues to grow, this is at a pace the owners are comfortable with instead of one dictated by shareholders. They have no intention of taking the company public, so their outlook on business is completely different than their publicly traded competition. Nisch points out,

> Not all companies have the ambition to grow to 1,000 stores. The idea of scale is not necessarily a measure of success for every company. Some companies do not aspire to be on the cover of Fortune Magazine. They are content to run successful businesses, to enjoy a great life and to make other people's lives really great.

Some business theorists may be quick to brush off such an illustration as an anomaly, but it is a counter-intuitive business strategy that is enjoying a surge in popularity. Companies see what is happening to their publicly traded counterparts and are not comfortable turning over the direction of the organization to a faceless mob of demanding shareholders. They do not want to deal with the issues of going public; they do not have to "feed the beast," Nisch observes, by striving for constant growth. Such companies are just as philosophical when considering an agency partner and most are not comfortable "giving their birthright to a big branding agency."

As the Managing Director for one of the largest store design consultant agencies Stephen Jay also mused on the trend: “The branding industry is a little wobbly right now. It could be a natural cycle, or it could be a sign of something larger down the road.” He postulates that the largest branding consultant agencies are experiencing a bit of “saturation.” Landor, for example, may not be able to get the $4 million dollars they once demanded to redo a company’s logo.

Ken Nisch believes that the future of brand agencies may be with companies that are able to present themselves as creative leader*s* instead of solution specific specialists. Consistent with all the research, branding is an expression of all the experiences of a customer, not isolated to a Super Bowl commercial, billboard, or physical retail store. Agencies that can provide solutions across *all* channels will find that they have a significant advantage.

**Challenges of creative individuals in leadership positions.** While Stephen Jay actively recruits for diversity, women and creative individuals often have a difficult time joining the highest leadership ranks of an organization. Susan Colantuono (2013) believes that “the greatness in them to achieve and sustain extraordinary outcomes by engaging the greatness in others” is greatly appreciated; yet it is not necessarily recognized as the “skills and competencies that can be summarized as business, strategic, and financial acumen” required to lead an organization. Colantuono contends that the individuals that make it to the top ranks are individuals that have benefited from informal mentorship and sponsorship. While appreciated, they are simply not afforded the opportunity for professional growth.

Kelly Mooney believes that the dynamic is more complicated and quoted Cheryl Sandberg saying that women often opt out of career opportunities before they exist. They lean back, paralyzed by the “what-if” scenarios; what if I get married? What if I have children? They see the workload and constant pressure of an organization's leadership and are reluctant to pursue the "Boys Club" as they would prefer to have more life-work balance.

Kelly's personal experience was similar to so many women. Thirteen years earlier, the presidency position at Resource was available and she did not even consider applying for the position until she mentioned the opportunity to a friend during lunch. Her friend encouraged her to apply; it is a bit disturbing to think how her whole life was changed by chance because of one conversation.

**Could branding leadership be considered a unique leadership paradigm?** I find it interesting that my core research question, "Could Brand Leadership be considered a unique leadership paradigm" was, by far, the most difficult question to me to ask and the most difficult for my participants to answer, even though each of the co-investigators had asked for sample questions ahead of time. I believe that the difficulty lay in the enormous disparity between practice and academic theory. While each of the co-investigators practiced leadership every day, most were clearly uncomfortable discussing leadership theory. In fact, Kelly Mooney never provided a direct response.

As the interviews progressed, I could have changed my wording to make the question more palatable, but I was intrigued to hear how each participant handled the theory of something that they do everyday. In trying to meet the demand for Brand Leadership skills, Ken Nisch answered, rather indirectly, by describing a trend for large, traditional, consultant companies steeped in marketing analytics, to recruit out of uber creative art schools such as Cranbrook Institute of Art or RISD (Rhode Island School of Design). They understand that their clients have a need for creative leaders but are not willing to invest in it themselves.

> Mark Bloemhard: There are a myriad of philosophies and leadership styles. While most leadership theorists agree that context is a significant component, most see leadership as a

two-part relationship between the leaders and the followers. Brand Leadership may open the aperture to include a third part, context, as a formal consideration of the ability of the organization, and the direction of the marketplace. In your opinion, is Brand Leadership a unique leadership paradigm?

Stephen Jay: I'm not sure if I'm interpreting your question right but I'm going to, you sort of guide me, okay? In my opinion, and I'm biased because I come from an organization whose central purpose is to define brands and bring them to life in ways that are meaningful and useful for customers, okay?

I think Brand Leadership is a component in a marketing led organization is absolutely essential. There are many organizations, big companies, big brands, that have never, articulated what their brand means or what their brand stands for. If they have, they put it on a shelf, they don't live it internally and celebrate it internally in a manner with great cohesive agreement among all the key functional areas of the business. I see it all the time. It is clear that Brand Leadership is seriously lacking in most organizations.

Although the managing director of a very large consultant agency, Stephen Jay started to answer the question in almost a timid way, repeatedly asking "okay?" as he continued. As I provided positive non-verbal feedback (nodding) I could see that he gained his usual confidence and finished with a clear and decisive appeal for Brand Leadership.

Jim Thomsen answered in a similar fashion, even asking me to rephrase my question:

Mark Bloemhard: What would you say about Brand Leadership? Do you consider it to be a unique leadership practice?

Jim Thomsen*:* Hmmm. I'm not well read about leadership, so I'm not quite sure of your question. Can you rephrase?

MB: Yeah, sorry. My academic showing thru, let me try again. There are a myriad of leadership styles; from visionary to charismatic to coercive. All of them have their strengths and weaknesses, but with my research I am wondering if leading a highly branded organization takes a specific style of leadership.
Is that any clearer?

JT: Absolutely. Without hesitation, I'd agree that Brand Leadership *is* a unique leadership style. I read a lot about leaders in other organizations and I wonder how they got there. What it luck? Timing? Pure skill? The reason I wonder these things is because some days I think I could do their job.

When I think about what Gary did at Restoration Hardware, I'm not so sure. The decisions he has to make on a day-to-day bases takes a level of intuition and confidence that far exceeds the ability of most leaders. I'm not saying that Gary is the perfect leader, but he has a unique set of skills that are highly needed. The question is what Restoration Hardware would be if a strong leader like Gary hadn't been there.

> Without strong Brand Leadership I’m not so sure that [Restoration Hardware] would be around today.

It is clear that Brand Leadership is a required leadership style. Interestingly, most of the participants, although they were seasoned leaders, were quite uncomfortable actually discussing leadership—which ties back to the need for an academic foundation.

# Discussion

The purpose of this research was to consider Brand Leadership as a distinct paradigm in the greater context of leadership studies. The study question, study goals, and findings presented in the first and fourth chapters are the basis for the ensuing discussion and conclusions that lead the present and final chapter to be organized into three sections, drawing inference and insight based on the findings. In the first section, I have provided a brief overview of the investigation. In the second, I have presented key findings of the study, drawing four major conclusions from the research. The final segment has been dedicated to offering theoretical and practical consequences of the results as well as implications for additional research.

## Review of This Research

The research study involved interviews with industry leaders in highly branded organizations using Representative Case Research, which "offers a way of investigating a subject holistically through the application of a rigorous set of procedures. It acknowledged contextual and subjective dimensions brought to the scientific enterprise by all research participants, which influence its products and their interpretation (Gordon & Shontz, 1990, p. 166).

Additionally, RCR recognizes that multiple sources of evidence—or the development of converging lines of inquiry—as the key to providing more convincing and accurate conclusions. This research recognized the contribution of 12 industry experts and identified them as "co-investigators" (CIs), in appreciation for the firsthand experience and wisdom they were able to provide. Converging lines of inquiry were provided, supporting the claim that the select CIs are expert individuals with deep experience leading highly branded organizations.

**Unique Contributions of the Research**

Adding the voices of highly experienced industry leaders to the existing body of research provides a focused contribution to the overall leadership discussion. While it has been said that branding was first manifested around 3,000 BC, one may argue that with the increased government compliance, regulation and litigation, the dynamics of national and international competition, relentless pressures of emerging technology, Brand Leadership is in its infancy stage (Adamson, 2006). As Bedbury (2003) declares, “It is a new brand world” (p. 1). And as purchasing increasingly shifts from a physical experience to a virtual and transaction-based interaction, brands and customers shift to relationship-based interactions and new skills and sensibilities are required. Leadership roles are converging, traditional structures are crumbling, and the customer’s voice carries more weight than ever. Less tangible strengths like emotional intelligence and psychological insight are just as key to leading a brand today as the ability to generate high ROI and increased shareholder value (Bedbury, 2003).

Accelerated technological advances have substantially improved industrial productivity and have allowed suppliers to produce an unprecedented array of products and services. The result is an accelerated commoditization of products and services, increased price wards, and reduced profit margins as niche markets continue to disappear (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). The result is that “88% of the Fortune 500 companies in 1955 no longer exist 65 years later in 2014” (Perry, 2015, para. 1). Even with organizations battling more vulnerability than ever before, the opportunities are even greater; 2014 is the first year that two brands have goodwill values of more than $100 billion and their values continue to increase: Apple at $118.9 billion (up 21% from the previous year) and Google, at $107.4 billion (up 15% from the previous year). Frampton states:

"Apple and Google's meteoric rise to more than USD $100 billion is truly a testament to the power of brand building" (as cited in Shayon, 2014, para. 3).

In his book, *A Whole New Mind,* Pink (2005) describes the seismic complexities of a remarkably new era. "We are moving from an economy and a society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Informational Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathetic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place—the Conceptual Age (p. 2). And with new eras bring new challenges; the world is faster, noisier, and exponentially more complicated than ever before. The demands of customers and the speed at which concepts are delivered in global markets are evolving at unprecedented rates. Goodwin (2015) provides dramatic examples of the major changes at work:

> Uber, the world's largest taxi company, owns no vehicles. Facebook, the world's most popular media owner, creates no content. Alibaba, the most valuable retailer, has no inventory. And Airbnb, the world's largest accommodation provider, owns no real estate. Something interesting is happening. (para. 1)

Since the Industrial Revolution, the world has developed complex supply chains, from designers to manufacturers, from distributors to importers, wholesalers and retailers, which have allowed billions of products to be made, shipped, bought and enjoyed in all corners of the world. In recent times, the power of the Internet, especially the mobile smart phone, has unleashed a movement that's rapidly destroying these layers and moving power to new places. The seismic complexities of this remarkably new era will require new leadership qualities and strategies (Pink, 2005).

From public to private, every organization can benefit from presenting a strong brand presence. Branding is not about using a consistent font or a color-corrected logo, it is the tangible and intangible expression of everything that an organization has been and will be. An excellent example of a person leveraging a brand is the presidential campaign of Donald Trump. With a personal brand worth approximately $1.1 billion dollars—if Trump's label is on a shirt, for example, it will sell for 3.7 times more than it would otherwise—Donald Trump has been able to draw national attention, despite his lack of political experience and his contentious platform (Rooney, 2016).

**Study Conclusions**

The main conclusions for this research are fourfold:

- Brand leadership as a higher order of strategy;
- The evolving role of Brand Leadership;
- Brand leadership considered unique theory.
- Brand leadership as an educational frontier.

**Brand leadership a higher order of strategy.** A unique contribution of this research has been an awareness and appreciation of Brand Leadership as a vital component, a keystone, to the over-arching organizational strategy. In the early stages of my research, I was plagued by a suspicion that my views on branding were misguided; that my personal experience as a brand consultant exaggerated my appreciation of its purpose. Is branding really a distinct discipline, or do I need to "be honest, and call it what it is: marketing" (Gerber, 2014, para. 11)? Could it be that branding is little more than industry jargon, or grandstanding; rhetoric designed to keep the management conversation moving.

"Today the word 'brand' has become part of the vernacular within every department of any progressive company," claimed Scott Bedbury (2003), former branding executive from Nike and Starbucks. "It is on everyone's radar" (p. 1). In our interview for this study, Ken Nisch, Chairman of JGA, asserted that "branding has to do with an organization's essence and value proposition; it is fundamental and underlying. Branding is the soul of the organization; marketing is the expression that may change with the audience." Stephen Jay, Managing Director of Fitch, North America, concurred and added, "Branding is far more important than just advertising. A brand is brought to life through experience. [Marketing] through media is passive awareness; totally different than engagement through branding." Ken Nisch emphasized that "branding is far, far, far more than image creation and projection through marketing media . . . it is understanding the market, sensing the market, identifying unmet and unexpressed needs and figuring out how that organization can deliver an experience for them."

The brand as an experience for the client or shareholder was a prominent theme throughout the interviews. In *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding,* Ries and Ries (2002) asserted that if a company is unable to build a powerful brand, "then all the advertising, fancy packaging, sales promotion, and public relations in the world won't help you achieve your objective" (p. 2). A brand demands a level of experience. In interview, Jay stated, "we offer a concept called *PHD,* or *Physical, Human, and Digital.* When everything is in harmony, we call them *experience signatures*, or a collection of deliberate touch points that are quintessential expressions of the brand." Jez Frampton, the Global CEO for Interbrand is in agreement. With 33 offices in 26 different countries, Interbrand is one of the world's largest brand consultant agencies guiding, on a global scale, the strategy of many household brands.

In order to survive, brands . . . will have to create truly personalized and curated experiences, or what we call 'Mecosystems,' [*me* combined with *ecosystem*] around each and every one of us. Such brands will have to re-humanize the data, uncover genuine insights, and deliver against individual wants, needs, and desires (as cited in Shayon, 2014, para. 6).

Branding is the tangible and intangible expression of everything that an organization has been and will be. "And, just for the record," Haig (2005) asserted, an organization's failure

> is usually the fault of the brand, not the product itself. If nothing was branded, every product within a category would stand an equal chance of success: hamburgers would just be hamburgers, running shoes would just be running shoes, dark cola-flavored carbonated water would just be dark cola-flavoured carbonated water. So the difference between success and failure rests not with the product, but with the brand. (p. xiii)

In fact, Kelly Mooney, CEO of Resource Ammarati, went so far as to say that "branding defines what the organization wants to be and what promise it's going to deliver and *all* of its manifestations which, may, or may not, include marketing; for example, customer service" (Mooney, personal communication, December 14, 2014). Ries and Ries (2002) concur, claiming "there is a seismic shift taking place in the world of business. The shift is called *branding*" (p. 3).

**The evolving role of brand leadership.** Driven by rapid technological advancement, the digitization of nearly everything, and the ever more intricate interdependencies of the global market, the business landscape has undergone a radical transformation over the past two decades. Operating in a new environment in which little is certain, the required speed of decisions is much swifter, and the dynamics that determine the life or death of an organization more complex than ever before. "Those who lead today's brands can no longer rely on once immutable truths or principles of leadership honored in times past . . . Today's leaders face extraordinary new challenges and must learn to think differently about their role and how to fulfill it. Those who do may have an opportunity to change the world in way their predecessors never imagined" (Frampton, 2015, p. 1)—leaders such as Richard Branson, Steve Jobs, and Howard Schultz.

The first aspect to the evolving role of Brand Leadership is the act of guiding the organization through the natural life cycles of a brand. Often the leadership loses the instinctual edge that made them great in the first place defaulting to a safer position, bunkered down by the security of market research and stalled by the weight of big data. As Stephen Jay suggested in our interview, "over time most great brands have a tendency to turn into analytical monsters, managing their brand through incremental improvements—a marginal point here and there." Kelly Mooney elaborated on this during our discussions:

> When a company wants to do something truly remarkable, they need to sail into unchartered waters and no amount of research is going to point them to the solution. Once an organization has lost their way, the leadership needs to have the courage to request outside help with a rebrand effort. Sometimes a brand will find that their initial proposition has outgrown what they initially stood for; their customers have aged, and you cannot just take an old brand and start talking in a younger voice.

Ken Nisch believes that if there is a strong brand leader focused on continuously evolving the brand, than a re-branding effort is not required. "A re-brand process is not a necessary activity if there is a strong brand leader" he postulates. However, "if there isn't a strong leader, then often the founder—such as Howard Schultz of Starbucks or Steve Jobs for Apple—has to return to get the brand back on track."

A common theme in the narratives from these discussions was an organization's need to stay close to the customer as being the solution to the brand evolving in a healthy direction; such a premise is in alignment with contemporary brand literature (Adamson, 2006; Bedbury, 2003; Godin, 2009; Lindstrom, 2010; Ries & Ries, 2002).

Brand leadership is here to stay. The second aspect of the evolving role of Brand Leadership relates to the position of the leader. With a relatively new trend in organizations to hire executives focused entirely on a client's experiences—for example, chief branding officers, CBOs or chief experience officers, CXOs—I was interested to hear the co-investigators' perspectives. Does such a relatively new appointment represent a tangible need in organizations, or is it a fleeting trend?

Meyer and Schwager (2007), writing in the *The Harvard Business, Review,* noted the rise of user experience in an article entitled "Understanding Customer Experience" They argued that the customer experience with a brand extends well beyond customer care; it extends through the entire customer lifecycle, beginning with advertising and ending when the product is no longer used—and someone needs to accept responsibility for it.

> [Branding] encompasses every aspect of a company's offering – the quality of customer care, of course, but also advertising, packaging, product and service features, ease of use, and reliability. Yet few of the people responsible for those things have given sustained thought to how their separate decisions shape customer experience. To the extent they do think about it, they all have different ideas of what customer experience means, and no one executive oversees everyone's efforts. (p. 119)

Kelly Mooney understands the need for one executive to oversee everyone's efforts and "has been passionately advocating CBOs for a long time" A CBO represents a new level of orchestration. The titles may vary—some call may it the chief experience officer, or CXO— but the concept is the same. For Mooney, the titles are absolutely critical as they are created to build internal momentum. Such titles, which represent corporate principles, are critical to build momentum and to move a concept "from theory to function."

The size of an organization plays a significant role in the decision to hire a CBO. For larger organizations, it is often difficult for the leaders to stay on top of all their job requirements. A CEO needs to focus on meeting the needs of employees, customers, investors, communities, and the law. chief marketing officers may have to spend a majority of their time examining annual marketing budgets and trying to determine the best return on investment for their marketing investments and determining how the market is reacting. "A big part of the CMO's role has changed from telling the world what their business is about to listening to what our customers are saying about us," according to Greg Petroff, CXO at GE (as cited in Meyer & Schwager, 2007, p. 118). At the end of the day, CMOs may have limited resources allocated to what matters most: strategy and experience.

> Some brand leaders, understandably, feel overwhelmed or worry that they don't know everything they need to know to stay on top.

> All are grappling with today's volatile environment in different ways, but all are looking to understand the landscape and master whatever skills are needed to excel and, more importantly, to connect and co-create with customers in today's more collaborative marketplace. (Frampton, 2013, para. 5–6).

While there is a natural overlap between the duties of a CEO and CMO, a CBO represents a new level of orchestration. The CBO—one of the newest executives to join the C-suite—is charged with leveraging best practices in strategy and user experience to gain market share. "People are realizing that a key differentiator for companies is the user experience," Carola Fellenz Thompson, CXO at Splunk stated (Meyer & Schwager, 2007, p. 117). The need for an executive that is responsible for the experience, or brand, is urgent. Customers have a greater number of choices today than ever before, more complex choices, and more channels through which to pursue them. In such an environment, simple, integrated solutions to problems—not fragmented, burdensome ones—will win the allegiance of the time-pressed customer" (Meyer & Schwager, 2007, p. 118).  "Your CMO can broadcast your message, but building a tribe around your brand requires a CBO. Take a page from the playbook of the most successful Fortune 100 companies: hire a CBO. Now" (Eidos, 2015, p. 6).

**Brand leadership considered unique theory.** While there is a myriad of ways in which leadership can be conceptualized, Northouse (2015) postulated the following components can be identified as central to the phenomenon:

- leadership is a process
- leadership involves influence,
- leadership occurs in groups, and,
- leadership involves common goals.

Northouse's (2015) definition of leadership is "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6). Former General Electric CEO Jack

Welch said: "Yesterday's idea of the boss, who became the boss because he or she knew one more fact than the person working for them, is yesterday's manager. Tomorrow's person leads through a vision, a shared set of values, a shared objective" (as cited in Bennis, 2009, p. 190)

There has been an evolution of approaches from Trait Approach (focus on the personality traits of the leader) to Skill Approach (focus on the leader's skill) to the Behavioral Approach (focus on what a leader does) to the Situational Approach (where a leader is sensitive to the competence and commitment levels of the follower) to Path-Goal Approach (the leader helps the followers be productive and find internal motivation) to Leader-Member Exchange Theory (the leader recognizes the existence of in-groups and out-groups) to Transformational Leadership (the leader inspires the followers to do great things) to Authentic Leadership (the leader fulfills the need for trustworthy leadership) to Servant Leadership (the leader puts the needs of the followers first) to Adaptive Leadership (the leader helps followers adapt to change) and Psychodynamic Approach (where a leader deals with the undercurrents of organizational life). Table 5.1 outlines the contributions of these evolving leadership theories.

Table 5.1

*The Evolution of Leadership Theory and Contribution*

| LEADERSHIP THEORY | CONTRIBUTION |
|---|---|
| Trait Approach | Focuses exclusively on the personality characteristics of the leader, not on the followers or the sitation. |
| Skills Approach | Frames leadership by describing three competencies from a leader's skills perspective: *problem solving skills, social judgment skills,* and *knowledge.* |
| Behavioral Approach | The behavioral approach is strikingly different from the trait and skills approach in that it focuses on what leaders do rather than who they are. It suggests that leaders engage in two primary types of behaviors: *task behaviors* and *relationship behaviors.* |
| Situational Approach | The Situational Approach is construed around the idea that followers move forward and backward along a developmental continuum, which represents the relative competence and commitment of followers. For leaders to be effective, it is essential that they determine where followers are on the developmental continuum and adapt their leadership styles. |
| Path-Goal Approach | Path-Goal Approach explains how leaders motivate followers to be productive and satisfied with their work. |
| Leader-Member Exchange Theory | LMX theory specifically addresses the relationship between the leader and each follower by recognizing the existence of in-groups and out-groups within an organization. |
| Transformational Leadership | Transformational Leadership is one of the most encompassing approaches to leadership and is concerned with the leader's ability to inspire followers to accomplish great things. |
| Authentic Leadership | Authentic Leadership fulfills the need for trustworthy leadership in society. |
| Servant Leadership | The central focus of Servant Leadership is the seven behaviors of leaders: conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community. |
| Adaptive Leadership | Adaptive Leadership encourages people to prepare and deal with change. |
| Psychodynamic Approach | Psychodynamic Approach addresses the undercurrents of organizational life through issues such as interpersonal communication, group processes, social defenses, and organization-wide neurosis. |

What is missing from the leadership discussion has been a way to consider the context as a part of leadership. Examples of a leader flourishing in one organization, but then flounder in the next, are commonplace. Howard Schultz, the CEO for Starbucks Coffee Company, for example, enjoyed spectacular success with Starbucks, but stumbled badly with his next venture, the purchase of the Seattle SuperSonics. While basketball is his long time passion and Seattle his hometown, he failed to replicate the same fabled success story of transforming a 500-year-old commodity into a high-demand brand.

Consider the following excerpt from an ESPN article:

> Though it seems like two decades ago now, I remember Howard Schultz five years ago, the day he purchased the Seattle SuperSonics from Barry Ackerley.
>
> He was a different man then, happy, vivacious and endlessly optimistic as he proudly towed around his younger brother, who was there to appreciate what a poor kid from the Brooklyn projects could accomplish. He spoke eloquently of his new acquisition as a public trust and fantasized about changing the culture of a league that presents a wide chasm between its players and its fans.
>
> On Tuesday, when Schultz sold the Sonics to an investment group from Oklahoma City, for all intents and purposes ending the legacy of the city's first professional sports franchise, he could not have been further from that energetic dreamer whose power of persuasion makes you actually believe he can achieve the impossible.
>
> He had become angry, bitter and maddeningly defiant, like a petulant child who decided to take his toy and go home. Only, in this case, he quite obviously threw his toy down a drainage ditch and stalked home while boldly misrepresenting the truth, telling everybody they could still play with the toy (Hughes, 2006, para. 1–4)

One of the most famous examples of context being a vital component to leadership is Steve Jobs. After being publicly humiliated by being fired by his board at Apple, Steve Jobs left to start a new venture, NeXT, Inc. in 1985. Both companies floundered, narrowly avoiding bankruptcy until 1997 when in an ironic turn of fate, Apple purchased NeXT, and Steve Jobs returned as Apple’s CEO.

> When Steve Jobs returned to Apple in 1997, the tech company he co-founded more than two decades earlier was on the brink of failure. During the final quarter of 1996, Apple's sales plummeted by 30 percent. Microsoft was the dominant computer company in the market.
>
> As Isaacson recalls in his biography on Jobs, a *Fortune* magazine story from that time said this of the company: "Apple Computer, Silicon Valley's paragon of dysfunctional management and fumbled techno-dreams, is back in crisis mode, scrambling lugubriously in slow motion to deal with imploding sales, a floundering technology strategy, and a hemorrhaging brand name"

> Moving forward, Jobs' strategy was to produce only four products: one desktop and one portable device aimed at both customers and professionals. For professionals, Apple created the Power Macintosh G3 desktop and the PowerBook G3 portable computer. For customers, there was the iMac desktop and iBook portable computer. (According to Jobs, the "i" emphasized that the devices were directly integrated with the Internet.)
>
> The move to a smaller product line and a greater focus on quality and innovation paid off. During Jobs' first fiscal year after his return, ending in September 1997, Apple lost $1.04 billion and was "90 days from being insolvent," Jobs says in the book. One year later, the company turned a $309 million profit. (Fell, 2011, para. 1–4)

It is clear that there is a connection between a leader and the context in which he or she leads. While most leadership theorists agree that context plays a vital role, most theories do not take context into account. In fact, Rost (1993) defines leadership as a two-part relationship: the leader and the follower. The intent of this research has been to open the leadership conversation to deliberately include a critical third part, the context, or the brand. It is critical that leaders in highly branded organizations understand the context in which they lead, the strength of the organization, the emerging trends of the market, and connects on an emotional level to all the shareholders of the organization—the brand of the organization. One of the most important qualities of a leader in a highly branded organization is the ability to simply say “no,” and to recognize which proposals are aligned with the context of the organization and to maintain the integrity of the brand by filtering out the crippling distraction of brand-wrong opportunities.

It is a little known fact that capitalism, the same driving force that recognizes and rewards change, or innovation, relentlessly demands that companies do not just grow, but grow faster. While many people understand that the value of a stock is speculative, many do not realize that an increase to the stock’s performance is the result of exceeding those financial speculations.

Thus, it is inaccurate to associate shareholder’s returns with mere growth. Shareholder returns are maximized when a company is able to outperform the investor’s expectation, which includes growth as a minimum expectation. Investors have an uncanny tendency to discount, into the present value of a company's stock price, whatever rate of growth they project the company obtaining. Even if a company is growing at an impressive pace, the only way the leaders can deliver a rate of return to shareholders in the future is to deliver more and to deliver faster than what is expected. Positive reactions in stock prices are not realized simply by the direction of the growth but also the unexpected positive changes to the company's projected earnings and cash flow.

If an organization is doing all it can to maximize its projected earnings and cash flow, then maintaining the historic performance is a very tall order; to increase a shareholder's return is often all too daunting and, some may argue, destined for failure. Empirical research suggests that a mere one tenth of all publically-traded companies are able to sustain growth that translates into an above average increase in shareholder returns (C. Christensen & Raynor, 2003; Collins, 2001; Foster & Sarah, 2001; Zook & Allen, 2001).

It is the weight of such expectations, based on a company's past performance that burdens a leader struggling to maximize shareholder's future gain (Rappaport & Mauboussin, 2001). The answer, many would contend, is to increase the growth trajectory through "brand-right" leadership—context based leadership that has the ability to capitalize on the strength of the organization and identify emerging market opportunities (Adamson, 2006; Kim & Mauborgne, 2005).

"Brand Leadership," Stephen Jay asserted in our interview, "is seriously lacking in most organizations." When asked if Brand Leadership should be considered a distinct leadership paradigm, Jim Thomsen answered:

> Absolutely! Without hesitation, I'd agree that Brand Leadership *is* a unique leadership style. I read a lot about leaders in other organizations and I wonder how they got there. Was it luck? Timing? Pure skill? The reason I wonder these things is because some days I think I could do their job. When I think about what Gary did at Restoration

> Hardware, I'm not so sure. The decisions he has to make on a day-to-day bases takes a level of intuition and confidence that far exceeds the ability of most leaders. I'm not saying that Gary is the perfect leader, but he has a unique set of skills that are highly needed. The question is what Restoration Hardware would be if a strong leader like Gary hadn't been there.Without strong Brand Leadership I'm not so sure that [Restoration Hardware] would be around today.

Brand leadership is a unique leadership style that, as this research indicates, is lacking in most organizations, yet, as co-investigator Jim Thomsen argued, plays a significant role in the survival of companies that have it.

**Brand leadership as an educational frontier.** The role of scholarship serving an industry is explicitly guided by the ideas of Abraham Kaplan and John Dewey and their extraordinarily tight connection between theory and practice. Theory, they both postulated, "is required to organize the problem at hand" (Shields & Tajalli, 2006, p. 2). When micro-conceptual frameworks are applied to the problem at hand, they guide data collection and interpretation. Thus scholarship guides the most practical, mechanical elements of empirical inquiry. A. Kaplan's (1964) sense of methodology incorporates a logic-in-use that focuses on the "problem at hand" (p. 205) and carefully considers conceptual aspects of empirical research. Dewey's (1916) instrumental view of theory is particularly useful because it treats theory as a tool to structure inquiry. When theory is approached as a tool (rather than truth), students and practitioners are better able to see the theory's relevance and usefulness.

While the need to create a strong brand is at the foreground of many firms, it is at the background of academic interest. A recent search for "brand manager" on the job search website Indeed produced 169,857 jobs. To put that in perspective, a search for "Industrial Design" produced 5,172 results, or approximately 3% (see Figure 5.1).

On the same day, there were no apparent college degree programs being offered for branding. Emerson College in Boston offers a branding certificate program, but overall the industry appears to be underserved by the academic community.

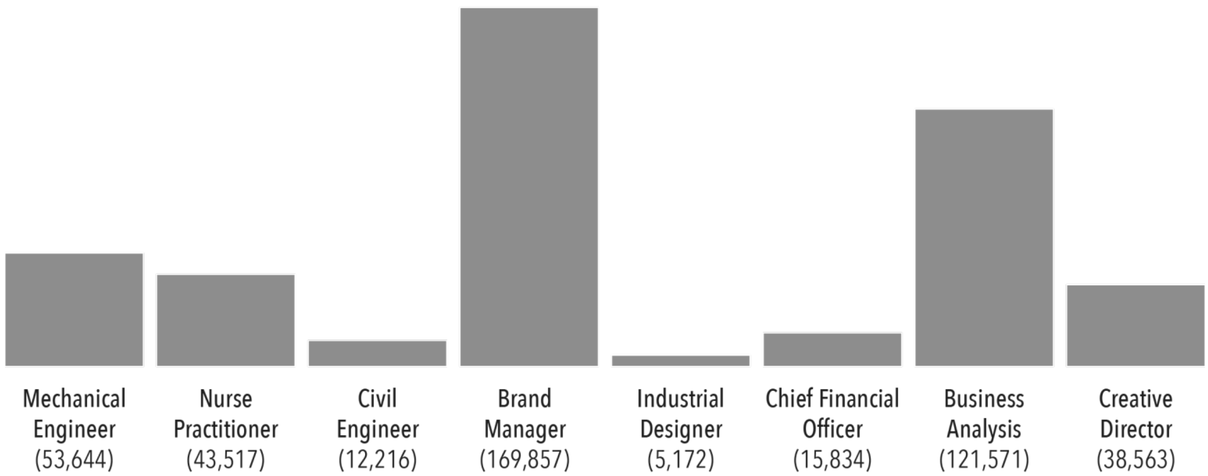


*Figure 5.1.* Number of brand manager jobs compared to listed job postings.

It is interesting that while Brand Leadership is here to stay, the academic community does not directly support the industry. C-level executives are being asked to make critical decisions without a proper academic foundation. One might compare branding to sales—there are few to no academic degrees in sales—but I would argue that it is not a fair direct comparison; sales is tactical and branding is strategic.

**Implications for Practitioners and Recommendations for Future Research**

Clearly, as well illustrated with a myriad of organizations, Brand Leadership is a much needed imperative for a leader. When I first began my research, I focused heavily on the sensational accolades of brand leaders such as Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple, Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, and Phil Knight, CEO of Nike. While their leadership is a legendary nod to the power of Brand Leadership, they have an unusual position: all are founders of their organizations. Not only did they have a personal, long-term care for the well being of the brand, they were all in a unique position to force that vision to come to life. The recent addition of executive positions such as chief branding officers and chief experience officers, needs to be recognized: they are charged with brand strategy, or the "the most challenging, complicated, and painstaking process that a company can embark on. It's more intuitive than analytical, and most of the time it can't be seen. But it can always be felt" (Bedbury, 2003, xvi).

**Timing as a pervasive issue.** While branding plays a significant role in the success of a business (Adamson, 2006; Bedbury, 2003; Godin, 2009; Lindstrom, 2010; Ries & Ries, 2002), I was surprised to learn that brand strategy is not always a top priority to an organization—timing may hinder its priority. A well-executed brand strategy is a long-term goal (approximately five to seven years) yet the shareholders expect a more immediate solution, forcing the leader to consider a marketing- based solution that provides more immediate returns on investment.

> In recent years, many companies have been so focused on survival that they neglected to consider what their brands mean—or could mean—to people. Locked in austerity mode, they've been hunkering down, reducing costs, increasing margins, and expecting low growth. But if brands really want to harness the power and potential of markets, [brand leaders] have to come back into the game. (Frampton, 2013, para. 10)

An impediment to the branding process may be the existing leadership structure. Many organizations are not large enough to have an executive dedicated to branding. "Unfortunately," Mooney asserted in our interview, "finding brand leaders may not necessarily be the highest priority for all corporate boards." While the benefits are clearly evident, the process takes far too long for most investments. Most investors are looking for a short-term solution (three to five years) and simply do not have patience to consider anything longer.

Ken Nisch has discovered the same struggle, saying in interview, "branding is more of an investment while marketing is more transactional. Founders, such as Steve Jobs, have a longer vision and greater control so they are more interested in the long-term benefits of branding."

I was surprised how easily it is to experience, first-hand, the well-documented gap between practice and theory. My third interview question ended up being quite a struggle for the co-investigators to answer. To reiterate, it was:

> There are a myriad of philosophies and leadership styles. While most leadership theorists agree that context is a significant component, most see leadership as a two-part relationship between the leaders and the followers. Brand Leadership may open the aperture to include a third part, context, as a formal consideration of the ability of the organization, and the direction of the marketplace. In your opinion, is Brand Leadership a unique leadership paradigm? If so, how?

As highly accomplished leaders, the co-investigators deal with leadership on a daily basis, but my asking about theory caused a noticeable shift in their confidence. Not one of the interviewees was comfortable speaking about theory. While I could easily regret my question, it does provide invaluable insight. Although I have personal leadership experience, the language of academics is so far removed from practical use, that it is rather alarming how easy it is to miscommunicate. Although Brand Leadership has the ability to be recognized as a distinct leadership paradigm, it will require additional effort to bridge the gap between practice and theory.

**Search for a corporate soul.** I have been heavily influenced by Victor Frankl's (1963) best-seller, *Man's Search for Meaning* in which he contends that people are primarily driven by striving to find meaning in one's life, realized from three possible sources: love, courage in the face of difficulty, and purposeful work.

> The case for viewing a company or other organization as a community is especially competing in a world where we spend more and more of our live in the workplace and grow ever hungrier for greater balance between work and personal life. Even as we are shackled by our pagers and cell phones to the workplace, we long for work that seems meaningful enough to justify missing out on great chunks of our children's lives. (Bennis, 2009, p. xix)

Executives are not immune to this. Interviewed about what gives their lives meaning, they mutter the latest corporate jargon such as "increasing shareholder value," "delighting customers."

Asked the same questions at home, they admit to profound symptoms of meaningless as they struggle with work-related stress and dysfunctional family lives. We face an "epidemic of anomie" (Goffee & Jones, 2006, p. 7).

In the interview for this study, Steven Jay asserted:

> There are many organizations, big companies, big brands, that have never articulated what their brand means or what their brand stands for. If they have, the put it on a shelf and they don't live it internally and celebrate it internally in a manner with great cohesive agreement among all the key functions of the business.
>
> To be remarkable, to stand out, to stretch your organization so one is worthy of being "remarked" is a high bar. You do not get to it by accident or by pumping a ton of money on ads or even products. It takes an immense amount of discipline and a brand [leader] that understands all these things.
>
> Organizations that are driven by the vision of the founder provide greater ROI. They have a very, very strong product focused vision and they are constantly molding and shaping that collection of development decisions, product related decisions, and branding decisions to create a sort of perfection, and customers get it.

Regrettably, research suggests that a majority of corporate changes end in bitter disappointment. Beer and Nohria (2000) hypothesized that "the brutal fact is that about 70% of all change initiatives fail" (p. 15). And Burnes (2004), who has conducted an extensive review of leadership and change literature, suggested that such a dismal statistic may even be higher. While all the marketing data may convincingly persuade an executive board that the campaign's strategic initiative is theoretically flawless and infallible, many researchers suggest that the main obstacle to organizational change may, in fact, be human resistance (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Peters and Waterman (1982) underscored this with their own conclusion that American companies display the time-proven basics of excellence: "quick action, service to customers, practical innovation, and the fact that you can't get any of these without virtually everyone's commitment" (p. 17).

While many of these systemic changes appear to be strategic and operationally sound, the challenge is getting everyone to understand the hard-to-define "soul" of the organization:

the brand. A Harris Poll, recently surveyed 23,000 U.S. residents employed full time within key industries, and in key functional areas and suggested some disturbing conclusions as illustrated in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

*Results of Harris Poll on US Employees' Attitudes to Their Organization*

| PERCENTAGE | EMPLOYEE SURVEY FINDINGS |
|---|---|
| 10% | percent felt that their organization holds people accountable for results |
| 13% | have high-trust, highly cooperative working relationships with other groups or departments |
| 15% | felt they worked in a high-trust environment |
| 17% | felt their organization fosters open communication that is respectful of differing opinions and that results in new and better ideas |
| 20% | have a clear "line of sight" between their tasks and their team's and organization's goals |
| 20% | were enthusiastic about their team's and organization's goals |
| 20% | fully trusted the organization they work for |
| 37% | said that they have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve and why |

*Note.* Based on information drawn from Covey (2004, pp. 2–3).

Covey (2004) draws this analogy from these troubling statistics:

> If the organization were a soccer team on the field, four of the eleven players would know which goal is theirs. Only two of the eleven would care. A mere two of the eleven would know what position they play and understand exactly what they are supposed to do. And all but two players would, in some way, be competing against their own team members rather than the opponent. (p. 3)

With similarities to Transformational Leadership, which engages followers by giving them deeper meaning, Brand Leadership may be a leadership paradigm that enhances motivation, morale, and job performance within the context of the organization. This gives followers' jobs a deeper resonance and results in an emotional connection that compels commitment. Co-investigator Kelly Mooney believes that it is up to the leader to clearly communicate the purpose, or the "soul" of the organization—the brand.

Once the brand is clear, then managing it becomes remarkably easier; everyone in the organization should have a form of intuition as to how their job reflects the tangible and intangible qualities of the brand.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to consider Brand Leadership as a distinct paradigm in the greater context of leadership studies. The research resulted in four unique contributions:

- Brand leadership, compared to marketing, is the higher order of an organization's overall strategy,
- The evolving role of the brand leader fulfills certain needs, including that Brand leaders see the organization in the eyes of the customer and that Brand leadership represents an internal momentum in which customers are at the center of the organization.
- Brand Leadership should be considered a unique paradigm as it considers the leader's intuition to be a quintessential proponent to understanding context of the organization and leading within the context of a larger marketplace.
- Brand Leadership is an untapped educational frontier.

Table 5.3 illustrates the unique contributions in terms of these four conclusions.

Table 5.3

*Research Conclusions and Unique Contributions*

| CONCLUSION | UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION |
|---|---|
| I.) Branding, compared to marketing is the higher order. | In the early stages of my research, I was plagued by a fear that my personal experience as a brand consultant distorted my perspective of branding.<br><br>Is branding really a distinct discipline. or do I need to "be honest, and call it what it is: marketing (Gerber, 2014, para 11)? Could it be that branding is little more than industry jargon, or grandstanding; rhetoric designed to keep the management conversation moving (Gerber, 2014)?<br><br>All the Co-Investigators considered branding to be the higher order. While marketing does incorporate all advertising channels, it does not address corporate strategy. What happens when things go wrong, for example, is not a marketing concern, but a branding issue. |
| II.) The evolving role of the Brand Leader fulfills certain needs. | (a) Brand leaders see the organization in the eyes of the customer and<br><br>(b) Brand leadership represents an internal momentum in which customers are at the center of the organization. |
| III.) Brand Leadership should be, in fact, considered a unique leadership paradigm. | Many leadership theorists agree that context is a critical element of leading, but all of the major leadership theories are a two part relationship: the leader and the followers.<br><br>Brand Leadership is a unique leadership as it considers the leader's intuition as an quintessential proponent to understanding context of the organization and leading within the context of a larger marketplace. |
| IV.) Brand Leadership is an untapped educational frontier | While the need to create a strong brand is at the foreground of many firms, it is at the background of academic interest. C-level executives are being asked to make critical decisions without a proper academic foundation. One might compare branding to sales (there are few to no degrees in sales) but one could postulate that it is not a direct direct comparison; sales is tactical and branding is strategic. |

The findings hold practical implications as well: Brand Leadership may prove to be a useful tool for leaders needing to grow their organizations faster to meet, and exceed, shareholder's demands. Additionally, Brand Leadership may prove to be useful in re-discovering the corporate soul, the meaning and purpose followers need to feel fulfilled in their work. Lastly, I have noted the stark absence of Brand Leadership in academia and have suggested that it may be an untapped educational frontier for higher education.

In his article, *New Rules of Brand Leadership,* Jez Frampton (2013), CEO of Interbrand, began with a question; "In our globalized, hyperconnected age, one question persists in boardrooms, corner offices, business schools, and conferences all over the world: What is leadership and how has it changed in the 21st century?" (para. 1).

It is my hope that this research has provided possible answers to Mr. Frampton's pressing challenge.

# Appendix

# Appendix A

## Interview Questions

### Branding Questionnaire

1. In your own words, how would you define the difference between branding and marketing?

2. There are researchers that say a brand begins internally; that the leaders of an organization hold in trust the ethos of the brand. How important is a leader's personal brand to the success of an organization?

3. It appears that the demands on a CEO have become such much greater with increased global competition reducing most goods and services to a commodity. How have the requirements for leadership changed as well?

4. There is a relatively new appointment among the C-Level executives; the adage of a CBO. In some of the most successful organizations, such as Apple, Nike, Starbucks, and Virgin, the CEO has made the majority of the brand related decisions. In your opinion, do CBO's provide a necessary and sustainable advantage?

5. Studies show "that in most organizations, two out of three transformations initiatives fail" (Sirkin, Kennan & Jackson, 2005, p. 110). While there are some great examples of successful rebranding (FedEx, McDonalds, Target, Harley Davidson, J Crew) when should an organization consider rebranding?

6. There are a myriad of philosophies and leadership styles. While most leadership theorists agree that context is a significant component, most see leadership as a two-part relationship between the leaders and the followers. Brand Leadership may open the aperture to include a third part, context, as a formal consideration of the ability of the organization, and the direction of the marketplace. In your opinion, *is* Brand Leadership a unique leadership theory? How so?

7. There is a well documented neurological tension that complicates leadership decisions that requires a high level of intuition. Schooler (1993) described the conundrum as "verbal overshadowing", or the tendency of the left brain, which controls speech, to shut down the right brain, which is intuition. It is difficult to articulate intuitive thought processes for as soon as they begin to communicate the left brain shuts down the right. Many creative leaders have a difficult time coping with such a neurological "deficiency". How have you seen leaders cope with such frustration?

8. Intuition plays a significant role in navigating the unchartered waters of today's unpredictable marketplace. In many cases, a leader has had to forcibly push their decision (Steve Jobs with the highly controversial Apple commercial, Lee Iacocca with the introduction of the Mini Van, etc.) without the support of research data and their closest advisors. Have you experienced a similar struggle with leaders? If so, could you tell us a little bit about it? What lessons did you learn from that experience?

9. Intuition, as history has proven, has its dark side as well. How does one evaluate a leader's decision making process? If it is largely based off of intuition, are there checks and balances that can help evaluate?

10. In your personal experience working hand-in-hand with brand leaders, what are the three most important characteristics of successful brand leaders?

11. There is a parallel of creatives to the struggle of women as they strive to realize their full potential; they are often appreciated for their “soft” skills but the strategic acumen to lead a complex organization is not noticed nor developed. I was alarmed to realize that the most innovative leaders (Steve Jobs, Howard Schultz, Sir Richard Branson, etc.) were *founders* of their organizations; further strengthening my suspicions that creative individuals have a difficult time being recognized for their strengths. What career advice would you give a creative individual striving to advance his or her career?

# Appendix B

## Informed Consent Form

**Antioch University**
**PhD in Leadership & Change**
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT FORM**
**Human Participant Research Review**

**Non-Sensitive Survey of Adults**

In partial fulfillment of a PhD in Leadership and Change, I am required to interview a select group of industry brand leaders; veteran brand consultants who have worked with a myriad of leaders in a variety of industries.

Because of your experience in the field of branding and leadership, you are being asked to be a co-investigator (CI) in this research study.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in this study. No sensitive information is sought, so the research would be no more than minimal risk. This information will be provided at the time of participation.

**Title of Dissertation:** On Contemporary Leadership and Branded Organizations

**What the study is about:** Whether it is leading a country, a county, a company or a crowd-funding campaign, leadership is often regarded as the single most critical factor in the success or failure of institutions. The goal of this study is to investigate branding as a means to further our understanding of contemporary leadership within the framework of highly creative organizations.

**What we will ask you to do:** If you agree to be in this study, we will simply conduct an interview with you. If the questions and research warrants, we may request a follow-up interview for better understanding.

The interview may contain a sample of the following questions:

1. **In your own words, how would you define the difference between branding and marketing?**

2. **There are researchers that say a brand begins internally; that the leaders of an organization hold in trust the ethos of the brand.** How important is a leader's personal brand to the success of an organization?

3. **It appears that the demands on a CEO have become such much greater with the advent of the internet and increased global competition.** How have the requirements for leadership changed as well?

4. **There is a relatively new appointment among the C-Level executives; the adage of a CBO.** In some of the most successful organizations, such as Apple, Nike, Starbucks, and Virgin, the CEO has made the majority of the brand related decisions. In your opinion, do CBO's provide a necessary and sustainable advantage?

5. **Studies show "that in most organizations, two out of three transformations initiatives fail"** (Sirkin, Kennan & Jackson, 2005, p. 110). While there are some great examples of successful rebranding (FedEx, McDonalds, Target, Harley Davidson, J Crew) the risk of failure is exceptionally great. When should an organization consider rebranding?

6. **There are a myriad of philosophies and leadership styles.** While most leadership theorists agree that context is a significant component, most see leadership as a two-part relationship between the leaders and the followers. Brand Leadership may open the the aperture to include a third part, context, as a formal consideration of the ability of the organization, and the direction of the marketplace. In your opinion, is Brand Leadership a unique leadership theory? How so?

**7. There is a well documented neurological tension that complicates leadership decisions that requires a high level of intuition.** Schooler (1993) described the conundrum as "verbal overshadowing", or the tendency of the left brain, which controls speech, to shut down the right brain, which is intuition. It is difficult to articulate intuitive thought processes for as soon as they begin to communicate the left brain shuts down the right. Many creative leaders have a difficult time coping with such a neurological "deficiency". How have you seen leaders cope with such frustration?

**8. Intuition plays a significant role in navigating the unchartered waters of today's unpredictable marketplace.** In many cases, a leader has had to forcibly push their decision (Steve Jobs with the highly controversial Apple commercial, Lee Iacocca with the introduction of the Mini Van, etc.) without the support of research data and their closest advisors. Have you experienced a similar struggle with leaders? If so, could you tell us a little bit about it? What lessons did you learn from that experience?

**9. Intuition, as history has proven, has its dark side as well.** How does one evaluate a leader's decision making process? If it is largely based off of intuition, are there checks and balances that can help evaluate?

**10. In your personal experience working hand-in-hand with brand leaders, what are the three most important characteristics of successful brand leaders?**

**Risks and benefits:**
The researcher does not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life, yet there is always a chance that you may find some of the questions about your work experience to be sensitive.

**Taking part is voluntary:** Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Antioch University. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

**If you have questions:** Your participation is voluntary and you may elect to discontinue participation at any time. The research will be conducted under the guidance of:

**Mitchell Kusy, PhD**
*Professor, Leadership and Change*
*Antioch University*
*mkusy@antioch.edu*

You also have the right to express any concern and/or complaint to the University Committee on Research Involving Human Participants at Antioch University:

**Philomena Essed, PhD**
*Chair, Institutional Review Board*
*Professor, Leadership and Change*
*essed@antioch.edu*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked.

I consent to take part in the study.

**Your Signature ________________________________________ Date _______________**

**Your Name (printed) ___________________________________**

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

**Your Signature _________________________________________ Date _____________**

**Signature of person obtaining consent _________________________ Date______________**

**Printed name of person obtaining consent _______________________**

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on [date].*

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